

Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Homeless Programs: Homeless Veterans Community Employment Services (HVCES)

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Agenda

- **Overview:** State of Veteran Homelessness
- **Going Deeper:** Why is Employment Important to Long-Term Veteran Housing Stability?
- **The Solution:** VHA Homeless Programs - Homeless Veteran Community Employment Services
- **The Opportunity:** Collaboration and Partnership
- Q&A



State of Veteran Homelessness



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State of Veteran Homelessness

- According to the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#), data show that on a single night in January 2024, there were 32,882 Veterans who experienced homelessness in the U.S. This is a record low in Veteran homelessness since measurement began in 2009.
- Veterans who experience sheltered homelessness often live in places such as emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, or other supportive settings.
- In contrast, Veterans who experience unsheltered homelessness live in places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings, and literally on the street.
- Further, 85 communities and three states have achieved an effective end to Veteran homelessness. Since the 2024 PIT Count was conducted, [Dallas, Texas](#), and [Hennepin County, Minnesota](#), both [effectively ended Veteran homelessness](#).



State of Veteran Homelessness

- No Veteran should be homeless in the country they swore an oath to defend.
- Despite the significant progress made to reduce Veteran homelessness, on any given night, there are 33,000 homeless Veterans in America. This is still too many.
- VA is committed to finishing the job of ending homelessness among Veterans because it is our nation's duty to ensure all Veterans have a place to call home.
- VA offers a wide array of services to address the full range of housing needs Veterans may have to help them regain their independence. We won't rest until every Veteran has a safe, stable, accessible, and affordable place to call home.



Risk Factors for Homelessness Among Veterans

- Risk factors contributing to Veterans experiencing homelessness can be conceptualized in two ways: individual-level and community-level.
 - Individual-level factors include mental health and substance use disorders, lack of stable income or employment, history of incarceration, lack of social support, and adverse childhood events¹.
 - Community-level factors include lack of affordable housing, lack of economic opportunities, neighborhood factors, and cultural factors.

¹ Tsai J, Rosenheck RA. Risk factors for homelessness among U.S. Veterans. *Epidemiol Rev.* 2015;37:177-95. doi: 10.1093/epirev/mxu004. Epub 2015 Jan 16. PMID: 25595171; PMCID: PMC4521393.



VA Homeless Programs



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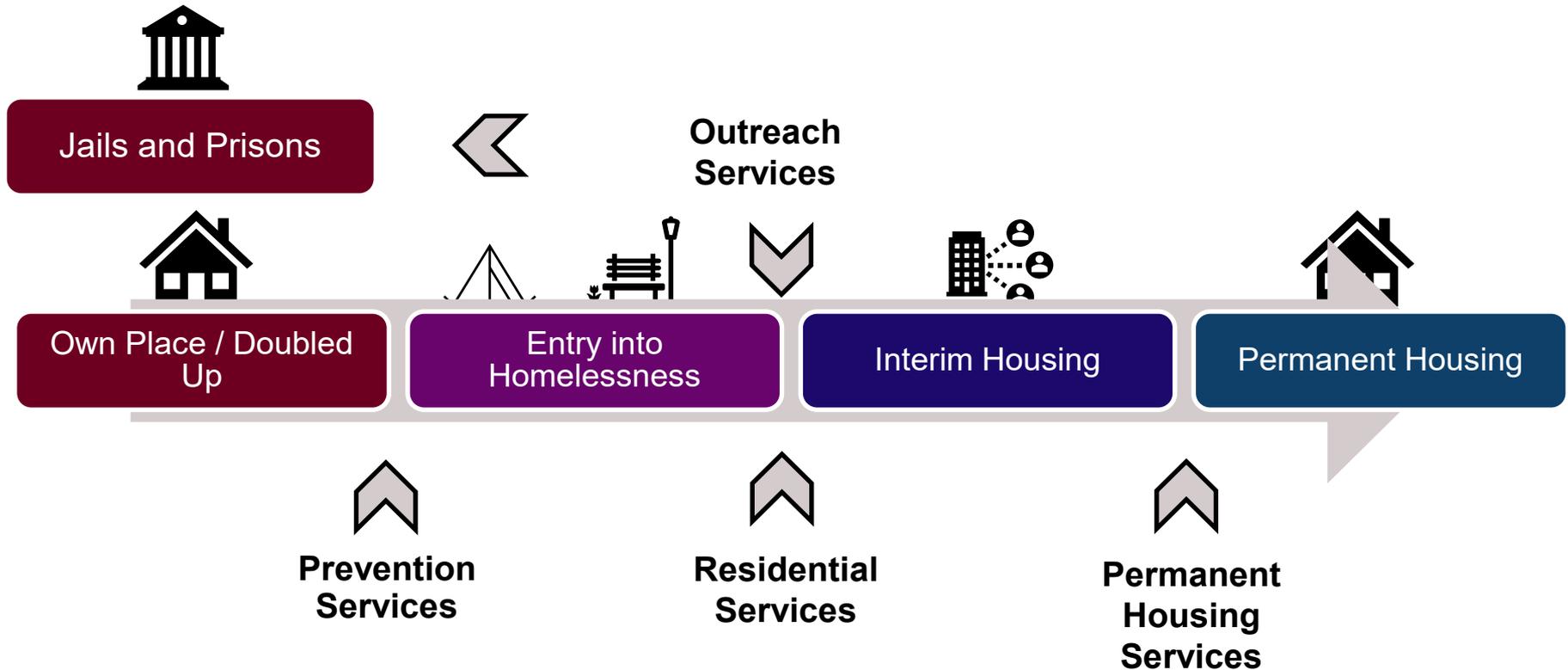
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About the VA Homeless Programs Office

- The [Homeless Programs Office](#) (HPO) serves as the **backbone of the federal response to Veteran homelessness**. Our Veteran-centered services empower Veterans and enable their independence.
- Our mission is to assist Veterans and their families in obtaining **permanent and sustainable housing** with access to **high-quality health care and supportive services**.
- Our vision is to **end homelessness among all Veterans and their families** by using evidence-based, innovative practices and partnerships that provide access to permanent housing and deliver other critical services.
- Our comprehensive services address all the different housing, treatment, and healthcare needs Veterans have. And for most unsheltered Veterans, **VA homeless programs are the front doors** to all of the federal, state, and local benefits and services that they have earned and deserve.



The Homeless Service System



VA Homeless Programs

Homelessness Prevention Services

- [Supportive Services for Veteran Families \(SSVF\)](#)

Outreach Services

- [Health Care for Homeless Veterans \(HCHV\) Outreach](#)
- [Community Resource and Referral Center \(CRRC\)](#)
- [National Call Center for Homeless Veterans \(NCCHV\)](#)
- Justice-involved Veterans
 - [Veterans Justice Outreach \(VJO\)](#)
 - [Health Care for Re-Entry Veterans \(HCRV\)](#)

Residential Services

- [HCHV Contract Residential Services \(CRS\)](#)
- [HCHV Low Demand Safe Haven \(LDSH\)](#)
- [Grant and Per-Diem \(GPD\) Transitional Housing](#)

Permanent Housing Services

- [Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing \(HUD-VASH\)](#)
- [Supportive Services for Veteran Families \(SSVF\)](#)

Specialty Services

- [Homeless Veteran Community Employment Services \(HVCES\)](#)
- [Homeless Patient Aligned Care Teams \(HPACT\)](#)
- [Legal Services for Veterans \(LSV\)](#)



Getting Veterans off the Streets Initiative

- This Administration isn't waiting for unsheltered Veterans to come to us. We're taking action through a bold, new initiative called *Getting Veterans Off the Streets*.
- The Getting Veterans Off the Streets initiative is a national surge launched by VA to directly address unsheltered homelessness among Veterans—those living in encampments, cars, abandoned buildings, or other unsafe conditions.
- Through September 30, 2025, we're hosting dedicated outreach surge events at every VA in America to move 20,000 unsheltered Veterans into permanent housing.
- During these events, VA and our partners go out into our communities to find unsheltered **Veterans wherever they are** (e.g., in encampments, on the streets, in the woods, under bridges) to offer them immediate enrollment in housing programs, health care, behavioral health services, and VA benefits—all in real-time.



What is Unsheltered Homelessness?

- Unsheltered homelessness refers to people **sleeping outdoors** in public spaces like streets, parks, or under bridges, or in locations not meant for habitation, like vehicles, tents, or abandoned buildings.
 - This is in contrast to sheltered homelessness, where people live in emergency shelters and other temporary settings.
- People experiencing unsheltered homelessness have [more significant health issues](#) than those who are sheltered and **struggle to access health care** and essential medical supplies, including health records, documents, and medications.
- Moreover, many also lack basic hygiene resources, causing them to face a **greater risk of contracting infectious diseases**.



Importance of Employment for Ending Veteran Homelessness



Importance of Employment

1. Provides a sense of purpose
2. Allows Veterans to use life/military experience in the civilian world
3. Provides mental & financial stability
4. Improves quality of life
5. Increases self-confidence and self-sufficiency
6. Decreases reliance on institutional care
7. Expands social networks, decreases social isolation
8. Promotes independence and graduation from Homeless Programs
9. Employment as a part of the holistic view of the Veteran



Unemployment and Suicide Risk

- Employment is a protective factor against suicide.
 - Income
 - Social Support
 - Self-efficacy
 - Sense of purpose
- The probability of suicidal ideation and attempts increases significantly with the presence of financial strain indicators (i.e., **unemployment**, financial debt or crisis, past homelessness, and lower income).



VA Homeless Programs: Homeless Veteran Community Employment Services (HVCES)



HVCES Mission

To provide employment services and resources to Veterans participating in VHA homeless programs to increase access to permanent housing, improve housing stability and promote community integration and independence. This is accomplished both through the provision of direct services and by providing a bridge to employment opportunities and resources in the local community.



HVCES Staffing

HVCES is staffed by Vocational Development Specialists who function as:

- Community Employment Coordinators (CEC)
 - Located at almost all VA medical centers (VAMC) nationwide.
- Employment Specialists embedded within:
 - Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV)
 - Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH)
 - These positions are funded at a limited number of VAMCs based on local needs.



HVCES Staff Roles

CECs:

- Coordinate with VA and non-VA partners to develop strategies to augment existing employment services and reduce barriers, as needed.
- Help build a direct communication bridge between staff and community programs and employers.
- Provide consultation and training regarding the importance of work and employment options for Veterans receiving homeless program services.

HCHV and HUD-VASH Employment Specialists:

- HCHV Employment Specialists are embedded in HCHV teams and may be located in a variety of settings. They provide direct services to homeless Veterans, including at VAMCs, Community Resource and Referral Center (CRRC), and Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC).
- HUD-VASH Employment Specialists are embedded within HUD-VASH teams and provide direct services to Veterans participating in HUD-VASH.

What Makes HVCES Unique

- HVCES is not a discrete program by design. HVCES is a service embedded within the VA homeless programs continuum of services.
- Employment outcomes for homeless Veterans are better when these services are well integrated into housing and case management.
- HVCES is not exactly the same across sites:
 - Staff ensure a range of employment services are accessible to Veterans experiencing homelessness based on local Veteran demographics, site-specific needs, and available resources.



How Do HVCES Staff Support Veteran Employment?

- **Coordination** with VA and non-VA partners to develop strategies to augment existing employment services and reduce barriers, as needed.
- Development of a **direct communication bridge** between staff, community programs, and employers.
- Provision of **consultation and training** regarding the importance of work and employment options for Veterans participating in VA homeless programs and services.
- Ensure no Veteran interested in returning to competitive employment falls through the cracks, either through provision of direct services or referral to an appropriate program based on the Veteran's level of therapeutic need.



Integration of Services

- Veterans who have experienced homelessness are more likely to be successful in obtaining employment when employment and housing services are **integrated**.
 - Holistic, **wrap-around services** to support the Veteran as they move through programs and services are essential.
- **Embed** employment staff into homeless teams.
- All members of the team engage in **“Work Talk”** from the time of initial engagement and throughout participation in the homeless program continuum.
 - Initial interventions and program enrollments **do not dictate** longer-term housing and employment pathways.
 - **Ongoing discussion** with Veteran on interests, goals, challenges, and needs is essential to long-term success.



Combining Income Streams – Income Maximization

Along with providing employment supports, encourage Veterans to explore other sources of income they may be eligible for:

- Combining Employment with Benefits
- Combining VA Benefits and Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Combining VA Benefits and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)
- Combining SSI/SSDI
- Include/consider other state/local benefit streams

Focus on finding the most appropriate, individualized, net-positive combination of income supports available.



Collaboration and Employment

- Employment success is not a competition; it's a team effort. Veteran employment is the goal!
- One Veteran, one job:
 - Job development based on the Veteran's identified goals, interests, strengths, and challenges.
 - Pool resources
 - Network with VA and community employment providers, such as, but not limited to, HVCES, VHA Vocational Rehabilitation Services (CWT), Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E), and Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) grantees.
- Collaboration and communication is essential!!!
- Get to know your local HVCES staff.



FY 2025 Employment Rates

As of Fiscal Year (FY) 2025, through July:

- HUD-VASH –55.71% of Veterans were employed while housed and receiving case management within HUD-VASH.
- Grant & Per Diem – 57.76% of Veterans who exited a residential program were employed, exceeding the national target.
- Approximately 9,000 Veterans were employed either full-time or part-time/temporary at exit from all VA homeless programs and services (Demographics and Exit Outcome Report, FY 2025).



Locating a Community Employment Coordinator (CEC)

Visit <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/HVCES.asp> to locate HVCES staff.

- CECs are listed by city and state based on the VA medical center located in the area.



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Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) <https://www.bls.gov/>



Keep Employment in the Conversation



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Q&A



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