

Frequently Asked Questions  
Veteran's Day Ending Veteran Homelessness Announcement  
November 11, 2015

*Q. How do you know that 1,432 homeless veterans have been housed?*

The Virginia Department of Veterans Services and Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development collect veteran housing data on a monthly basis from Virginia's Homeless Continuums of Care (CoCs), the federal Veterans Affairs Medical Centers (VAMCs) that serve Virginia veterans, and local Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) providers.

*Q. Why are you counting veterans housed since October 2014?*

On September 24 and 25, 2014, communities across the state convened for a two-day Boot Camp to set goals and develop strategies to house 360 homeless veterans in 100 days as well as develop strategies to improve systems. The start of the 100 Day Challenge was announced by Governor McAuliffe following this event.

*Q. What is the Mayor's Challenge?*

The Mayor's Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness is a way to solidify partnerships and secure commitments to end Veteran homelessness from mayors across the U.S. by the end of 2015. The call to action was first announced by First Lady Michelle Obama and echoed by the Secretaries of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), and by the National League of Cities.

For more information on the Mayor's Challenge, visit:

[http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program\\_offices/comm\\_planning/veteran\\_information/mayors\\_challenge/](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/comm_planning/veteran_information/mayors_challenge/)

*Q. Which Virginia mayors have signed on to the Mayor's Challenge?*

In addition to Governor Terry McAuliffe, 20 Virginia Mayors and County leaders have signed the Challenge:

1. Mayor William D. Euille – Alexandria
2. Arlington County Board Chair Mary Hynes - Arlington
3. Mayor Satyendra Singh Huja – Charlottesville
4. Mayor Alan Krasnoff – Chesapeake
5. Mayor Sherman Saunders – Danville
6. Mayor R. Scott Silverthorne – Fairfax
7. Board of Supervisors Chairman Sharon Bulova - Fairfax County
8. Mayor Mary Katherine Greenlaw – Fredericksburg
9. Mayor George E. Wallace – Hampton

10. Mayor Christopher B. Jones – Harrisonburg
11. Mayor Lisa Merkel – Herndon
12. Mayor Brenda Pelham - Hopewell
13. Mayor McKinley L. Price, DDS - Newport News
14. Mayor Paul D. Fraim – Norfolk
15. Mayor W. Howard Myers – Petersburg
16. Mayor Kenneth Wright – Portsmouth
17. Mayor Dwight Jones – Richmond
18. Mayor David A. Bowers – Roanoke
19. Mayor Byron "Randy" Foley – Salem
20. Mayor William D. Sessoms, Jr. - Virginia Beach

*Q. Just today, I saw a homeless veteran on the street. How can Virginia claim to have eliminated veteran homelessness?*

When we say we have “functionally ended” veteran homelessness, that means that we have reached a point where we are housing more veterans than those who are being identified as homeless. This means that any veteran who becomes homeless will move into permanent housing within an average of 90 days of connecting with a community based homelessness response system that includes supportive services that can assist in sustaining the veteran’s housing.

Changing economic realities, the unpredictability of life, and unsafe or unwelcoming family environments may create situations where individuals, families, or youth could experience or be at-risk of homelessness. Homelessness can strike at any time, and therefore may not ever truly be “eliminated”. The key, however, is having a community based response and service system in place for identifying these individuals and quickly meeting their needs.

Therefore, **functionally ending** veteran homelessness does not mean that no veteran will ever experience a housing crisis again. Functionally ending veteran homelessness means that every community has a sustainable, systematic response in place that ensures homelessness is prevented whenever possible, or is otherwise a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience.

*In addition, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) provided these criteria:*

- No chronically homeless veterans or they are in the process of being housed in 90 days
  - For veterans refusing to be housed, plan for continual outreach and a resource will be available when choose to be housed
- On average, homeless veteran are housed within 90 days of being identified
- The number of veterans being housed is greater than the number becoming homeless (monthly)
- The number of veterans entering in transitional housing is less than the number becoming homeless (monthly)

For further information on the USICH criteria for ending veteran homelessness:

[http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset\\_library/Achieving\\_the\\_Goal\\_Ending\\_Veteran\\_Homelessness\\_v3\\_10\\_01\\_15.pdf](http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Achieving_the_Goal_Ending_Veteran_Homelessness_v3_10_01_15.pdf)

*Q. What is the State Action Plan to End Veteran Homelessness? How can I get a copy?*

The State Action Plan to End Veteran Homelessness was created by the Governor's Coordinating Council on Homelessness through input that was provided by federal, state, and community stakeholders during the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Summit on Ending Veteran Homelessness in June 2014. The Action Plan is focused on cultivating partnerships, securing additional resources, and increasing efficiencies in the delivery of housing and supportive services.

For a copy of the State Action Plan, visit:

<http://www.vceh.org/extras/FinalPlanVetHomelessness.pdf>

*Q. Who are the federal, national, state, and community stakeholders?*

Federal: US Department of Veterans Affairs, US Department of Housing and Urban Development, US Department of Labor, National League of Cities.

National Organizations: National League of Cities, Community Solutions, and Rapid Results Institute

State: Department of Veterans Services, Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness, Department of Housing and Community Development, Virginia Housing Development Authority, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, Department of Social Services, Virginia Employment Commission, Department of Motor Vehicles, and Department of Corrections.

Community: Homeless Continuums of Care, including non-profit and faith based homeless service providers, local governments, Supportive Services for Veterans Families providers, Public Housing Authorities, Veterans Services Organizations, human service non-profits, landlords, and businesses.

*Q. Which Veterans Affairs Medical Centers (VAMCs) have been involved?*

- Hampton VAMC (Virginia)
- Hunter Holmes McGuire VAMC (Virginia)
- Salem VAMC (Virginia)
- Washington DC VAMC
- Martinsburg VAMC (West Virginia)
- Mountain Home VAMC (Tennessee)

*Q. How are homeless veterans identified?*

Homeless veterans are identified through local outreach workers and Continuums of Care (CoCs) homeless service providers, Veterans Affairs Medical Centers, Virginia Veteran and Family Support of the Department of Veterans Services, and Supportive Services for Veterans Families

providers. When identified, many communities compile a community by-name list that are prioritized by need and typically entered into the CoC Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

*Q. How have homeless response and housing placement systems for veterans been improved?*

The overall community response systems to veteran homelessness have improved as a result of:

- Community coordinated outreach using common assessment tools enabling improvements in identifying homeless veterans.
- Creation of community by-name lists of current homeless veterans that are prioritized by vulnerability to triage homeless veterans to the appropriate resource.
- Following Housing First principles, which provide an approach to ending homelessness that centers on providing people experiencing homelessness with housing as quickly as possible – and then providing services as needed.
- Regular community and state level meetings to assess barriers and implement process improvements/acceleration strategies aimed at removing bottlenecks.
- Increased engagement of veteran specific resources with mainstream non-veteran specific resources particularly with healthcare, behavioral health, and employment services.

*Q. What specific actions have been taken by the McAuliffe Administration to end veterans homelessness?*

In June 2014, Governor McAuliffe became one of the first Governors to sign on the *Mayor's Challenge to End Veterans Homelessness*. The Governor's Coordinating Council on Homelessness created a Veteran Sub-Committee to develop and monitor progress of the State Action Plan. As part of the State Action Plan, the Coordinating Council implemented the statewide Boot Camp and 100 Day Challenge. The Veteran Committee meets monthly to address barriers and align efforts and reports progress regularly to the Governor's Office.

*Q. What is a Point-in-Time Count?*

The Point-in-Time (PIT) count is a count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons, on a single night in January. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development requires that Continuums of Care conduct an annual count of homeless persons, including homeless veterans, who are sheltered in emergency shelter, transitional housing, and Safe Havens on a single night. Community providers and volunteers participate in this event to provide a 24-hour snapshot.

*Q. What is a Continuum of Care?*

A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals. According to HUD, a CoC is “a community plan to organize and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing and maximize self-sufficiency. It

includes action steps to end homelessness and prevent a return to homelessness.” It is designed to promote the following:

- Communitywide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness;
- Funding for efforts by nonprofit providers, and State and local governments to quickly re-house homeless individuals and families while minimizing the trauma and dislocation caused to homeless individuals, families, and communities by homelessness;
- Access to mainstream programs (employment, benefits, behavioral healthcare, etc) by homeless individuals and families; and
- Optimize self-sufficiency among individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

*Q. What is the Governor’s Coordinating Council on Homelessness*

The Governor’s Coordinating Council on Homelessness oversees the implementation of strategies and action steps within the statewide plan to effectively address homelessness. Co-chaired by Secretary Bill Hazel and Secretary Maurice Jones, the coordinating council is similar to the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness with a membership of a cross section of government agencies as well as local and statewide nonprofit organizations. Four committees of the coordinating council meet on a regular basis to address implementation of the plan’s action steps.

One of the four committees is the Ending Veteran Homelessness Committee which is composed of 3 federal agencies, 8 state agencies, the Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness, and a local Continuum of Care representative and coordinates efforts to streamline services, align resources, and reduce barriers to efforts to end veteran homelessness.

*Q. How can others help?*

To maintain this historic progress we need all Virginians to be a part of these efforts to ensure all veterans have a place to call home. If you know of a veteran experiencing homelessness, help us connect them to the resources and supports that are available by contacting the Virginia Department of Veterans Services or the local homeless Continuum of Care (CoC):

<http://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/images/Housing/Crisis-Assistance-Directory.pdf>

In addition, there is always a need for additional landlords, particularly those with flexibility in regards to veterans with bad credit, criminal offenses, etc. Multi-family property owners and landlords can post available properties and units on Virginia Housing Search (<http://www.virginiahousingsearch.com/Veterans.html> ).

Communities also need household items and move-in kits for homeless veterans accessing housing. These can be provided to Veterans Affairs Medical Centers (VAMCs) or local Continuums of Care (CoCs).

*Q. What is permanent supportive housing and rapid re-housing?*

Permanent supportive housing is decent, safe, affordable, community-based housing that provides tenants with the rights of tenancy and links to voluntary and flexible supports and

services for people with disabilities who are experiencing homelessness. Permanent supportive housing is a proven, effective means of reintegrating chronically homeless and other highly vulnerable homeless families and individuals with psychiatric disabilities or chronic health challenges into the community by addressing their basic needs for housing and providing ongoing support. The HUD- VASH program is permanent supportive housing targeting chronically homeless veterans and is administered collaboratively by local Veterans Affairs Medical Centers and local Public Housing Authorities.

Rapid re-housing is the practice of focusing resources on helping families and individuals quickly move out of homelessness and into permanent housing, which is usually housing in the private market. Services to support rapid re-housing include housing search and landlord negotiation, short-term financial and rental assistance, and the delivery of home-based housing stabilization services, as needed. Priority is placed on helping individuals and families move into permanent housing as rapidly as possible and providing services to help them maintain housing. Rapid re-housing has demonstrated effectiveness in reducing homelessness, particularly among families. Rapid re-housing also increases turnover in shelters, which allows them to accommodate more families without increasing capacity. The Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program and the veteran rapid re-housing portion of the Virginia Homeless Solutions Program are two interventions targeting homeless veterans.

*Q. Has additional state funding been appropriated to end veterans homelessness?*

Governor McAuliffe and the 2015 General Assembly appropriated an additional \$1 million for state rapid re-housing programs, including \$500,000 that was specifically earmarked for veterans. These funds are available in areas of the state with no veteran specific resources and for veterans not eligible for Veterans Affairs benefits. The rapid re-housing funds are a part of the Virginia Homeless Solutions Program funding administered through the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development.

*Q. What other resources have been leveraged?*

Federal funding from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and United State Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) HUD-VASH program, which provides housing vouchers with services, and the Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) program, which assists with rapid re-housing, short-term rental assistance with services. Additional resources have been provided such as extra Section 8 vouchers from local Public Housing Authorities and move-in kits and furniture from local non-profits and businesses.

AmeriCorps VISTA and National Civilian Community Corp (NCCC): Over the course of this initiative, the Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness placed AmeriCorps volunteers in seven communities around the state to build capacity among the homeless services providers to advance the effort to functionally end veteran's homelessness. In the Hampton Roads area, two teams consisting of 15 AmeriCorps NCCC members worked to create a by-name list for veterans and completed vulnerability assessments for the veterans on the by-name list. A final AmeriCorps VISTA worked out of the VCEH offices to coordinate the statewide effort and to assist communities in problem solving as local challenges arose.

AmeriCorps Virginia Veteran Corp: Over the course of the year, Virginia Veteran And Family Support (formerly Virginia Wounded Warrior Program), placed AmeriCorps volunteers in Hamptons Roads and Central Virginia to serve as Housing Navigators. These Navigators would assist communities by helping homeless veterans get documentation necessary to be housed and work with them to assist in finding actual housing.

*Q. How has Dominion Virginia Power and Appalachian Power Company supported this effort?*

Dominion Virginia Power has expanded the EnergyShare Program to provide \$500 pledges to homeless veterans being housed in addition to support previously homeless veterans who need utility assistance. The pledges can be used for electricity service deposits, heating fuel purchases,, and energy bill assistance. They have committed \$2.5 million for the next 5 years (\$500,000 per year) which can assist 1,000 veterans per year. The program is accessed through Supportive Services for Veterans Families providers and the Virginia Department of Veterans Services. Appalachian Power Company has a similar pilot program that provides \$100,000 in utility assistance to homeless veterans being housed in Southwest Virginia.

*Q. If I am a homeless veteran, who should I call?*

- Veterans Affairs Homeless Hotline: 1-877-4AID-VET (1-877-424-3838)
- 2-1-1 VIRGINIA: Dial 2-1-1 or <http://www.211virginia.org/consite/>
- Local Homeless Continuum of Care contacts:  
<http://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/images/Housing/Crisis-Assistance-Directory.pdf>

*Q. Who can I contact for more information?*

You can contact Matt Leslie ([Matthew.leslie@dvs.virginia.gov](mailto:Matthew.leslie@dvs.virginia.gov)) or 804-786-0599, or contact Sim Wimbush ([Sim.Wimbush@dvs.virginia.gov](mailto:Sim.Wimbush@dvs.virginia.gov)) 804-786-0596 at the Virginia Department of Veterans Services