Homeless System Response:
Coordination with the Veteran System

An Essential Partnership

In order to most effectively and efficiently deploy available resources, communities should establish strong partnerships with other population-specific homeless and housing resources that ensure the entire homeless services response system prioritizes equity as a foundation and works to end homelessness.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have recognized the importance of collaboration to meet the needs of the country's most vulnerable citizens. Ideally, programs funded by HUD and the VA are demonstrating this same collaboration at the local level.

The VA, along with its non-profit partners, has established a robust group of programs designed to serve veterans experiencing homelessness and/or at risk of experiencing homelessness. In many communities, the Continuum of Care (CoC), veteran-serving programs, and other stakeholders have created a Veteran Leadership Team and have organized a system to coordinate access to resources targeted to veterans. This Veteran Leadership Team must ensure representation of a diverse set of perspectives, values, experiences, and expertise by including veterans with lived experience and system partners that have worked with veterans representing marginalized groups—such as Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC)—and veterans with disabling conditions including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance use disorders. This document provides a brief overview of VA programs, COVID-19 responses, and coordination opportunities.

VA Homeless Program Summary

The following are veteran-focused programs targeted to addressing or ending veteran homelessness:

- **Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF):** The SSVF program is focused on rapidly rehousing veteran families experiencing homelessness and preventing homelessness for those at imminent risk due to a housing crisis. The VA makes grants to private non-profit organizations to provide eligible veteran households with outreach, case management, and assistance in obtaining VA and other mainstream benefits that promote housing stability and community integration. Services include outreach, housing problem-solving, case management, housing navigation, and assistance in obtaining VA benefits or other public benefits. SSVF is one of few VA programs that can serve the entire household (including dependents)—not just the eligible veteran. View the list of FY 2021 SSVF grantees.

- **HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH):** HUD-VASH is a collaborative permanent supportive housing program administered by HUD and the VA together; it combines HUD housing vouchers with VA supportive services to help veterans experiencing homelessness and their families find and sustain permanent housing. Through public housing authorities, HUD provides rental assistance vouchers for privately owned housing to veterans who are eligible for VA health care services, are experiencing homelessness, and meet clinical service need requirements. VA case managers connect veterans with support services such as health care, mental health treatment, and substance use counseling to help maintain housing in the community. View the list of VA Medical Centers (VAMCs).

- **Homeless Veterans Grant and Per Diem (GPD):** The GPD program is a component of the Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) program and is a transitional living project for veterans experiencing homelessness. Program models vary, and some programs look similar to a CoC transitional housing program while others focus on a more short-term connection to permanent housing. View the list of FY 2020 GPD grantees.

VA Program Participation in Coordinated Entry

The VA requires that the VAMC and VA-funded programs actively participate in the local CoC's coordinated entry implementation. Ideally, all veteran programs should be fully integrated into your coordinated entry programs including the following key elements: an established access point or process for veterans seeking services, case

conferencing that is inclusive of the establishment and updating of a by-name list (BNL), shared assessment tools, and data sharing on either the household or aggregate level. View the VA's memo on coordinated entry.

As communities review the coordination and participation between the VAMC and VA-funded programs and the local CoCs' coordinated entry implementation, they should incorporate diverse stakeholders and persons with lived experience to ensure the coordination is equitable and meets the needs of marginalized populations. Communities should advance racial equity through assessments and prioritization in coordinated entry implementations.

The SSVF program requires same-day screening and enrollment of eligible veterans to immediately address participants' housing crises. March 2020 guidance from the VA acknowledged that there may be circumstances where implementation challenges of local coordinated entry systems may hamper the ability of the program to act as urgently as they need to respond to a veteran. This concern is further amplified when faced with the health risks of COVID-19. Communities should review local data to determine how quickly veterans can access SSVF services and if there are any inequities in the data related to which veterans are able to access SSVF services and/or how they can navigate successfully to permanent housing through those services. Ensure that access points, either physical or virtual, are accessible by those most in need of the services being offered.

In communities where same-day enrollment in VA services is not happening, SSVF can act as a veteran-specific access point for entry into the homelessness system; however, there should still be connection and sharing with the larger coordinated entry implementation. If your community has not outlined a clear process on how to serve veterans presenting for housing services quickly, it would make sense to revisit your current process and determine what changes can ensure swift and equitable linkages to care for veterans presenting at access points in your community.

COVID-19 Response

The VA has increased funding and flexibilities throughout its programs to address the needs of veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

- An emphasis on emergency housing assistance to help veterans and their families avoid congregate shelter settings—both GPD and SSVF have the ability to place veterans in hotels and other non-congregate settings.

- Deeper, longer-term rental subsidies via SSVF while Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding is allowable and available.

- Greater coordination between SSVF and HUD-VASH to help move veterans into housing quickly.

- Expanded definitions to increase the availability of homelessness prevention and housing problem-solving/rapid resolution services.

Coordination Opportunities

If your community is not fully connected with the VA programs described in this document, connect with them now to create a coordinated, equitable housing placement response for those veterans currently in non-congregate and congregate shelter.

A great starting point for your work can be to jointly review system-level data to understand disparities in who is served and what their housing outcomes are. This can help ensure your collaboration is informed by data and driven to emphasize equity across programs.

An Emphasis on Client Choice

Whenever possible, veterans seeking non-congregate shelter or housing services who qualify for VA programs should be connected with those programs. This will allow your community to serve as many households experiencing homelessness as possible by directing households to the specialized resources for which they may be qualified. However, there may be circumstances where veterans are not eligible for or interested in receiving VA programs or services. In this case, veteran choice must be respected and the CoC should work with veteran-serving programs to identify quick pathways to other non-VA options.