FIVE HIGH IMPACT STEPS
Mayors Challenge to END Veteran Homelessness

With First Lady Michelle Obama’s announcement of the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, the race to zero is on. Mayors are uniquely positioned to accelerate progress in their communities. Here are five proven steps that mayors can take to ramp up and achieve the goal.

ESTABLISH LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING
There are many partners in the movement to end veteran homelessness, and efforts are undoubtedly underway in your community. The partnerships are essential, but diffuse, uncoordinated leadership and decision-making can reduce impact. Agreed upon leadership and decision-making are essential.

- Convene the key players: Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center Director; head of the relevant Continuum(s) of Care (Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD]-funded homeless system); Public Housing Authority Director; and leading nonprofit agencies.
- Agree upon the core elements of the approach (see below), and upon decision-making structure.
- Dedicate significant staff, with authority to act on your behalf, to help disrupt the “business as usual” approach to homelessness within your own team.

SET CLEAR NUMERICAL GOALS AND TIMELINE
The goal of ending veteran homelessness by the end of 2015 is doable but ambitious. It requires clear numerical goals and a tight timeline.

- Establish the target: the number of veterans who are homeless, or will become homeless, by the end of 2015 (VA has data necessary to make these estimates).
- Set the trajectory for the goal of ending homelessness:
  - How much of each core strategy is needed (see Strategies below)?
  - Who will deliver it?
  - Who will pay for it?
  - When will it be done?
- Establish a time limit for homelessness (example: any homeless veteran, once identified, will be housed within 30 days).

CREATE ACCOUNTABILITY
Solid, shared data and performance benchmarks measure progress toward the goal and hold participants accountable. At present, different partners may use different data and benchmarks.

- Establish the data system(s) to be used, and the entity(s) that will be responsible for collecting and reporting data – How many homeless veterans are being housed? How long is it taking? How many veterans remain homeless?
- Create a system of regular reporting on progress; identification of problems; and use of collective knowledge to address issues or make course corrections promptly. To whom will these reports be made (see Leadership and Decision-Making above)?
EMPLOY CORE, EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES

Achieving the goal within the timeframe will require peak effectiveness from program interventions. Resources will need to be shifted from less effective to more effective interventions.

- Proven effective strategies are:
  - Outreach to identify and engage homeless veterans.
  - Crisis housing to keep people safe until they are quickly re-housed.
  - Rapid re-housing for those requiring less assistance, including linkages to services.
  - Permanent supportive housing for those with disabilities and long homeless histories.
  - Coordinated assessment and entry systems are necessary to get each veteran connected to the proper intervention.

- Other, less effective interventions should be phased out and resources shifted to solutions.

HAVE A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

A communications strategy is necessary to:

- Maintain momentum by articulating goals and reporting on progress.
- Engage key constituencies such as landlords, employers, veteran service organizations, philanthropy, the faith community, and the public.
- Define what ending veteran homelessness means (example: veterans may have crises and lose their housing, but none will live on the street, and none will stay homeless longer than 30 days).
- Challenge your local community’s misperception that veteran homelessness is a problem that cannot be solved.

PRINCIPLES

HOUSING FIRST – Housing is the platform veterans need to address their other challenges, so getting people into housing will be the first course of action.

SERVICES AS NEEDED – Some veterans require on-going services, some temporary services, and some just a little financial help. While housing solves homelessness, service needs must also be met. The choice of which services to use, however, should be left to the individual veteran.

EMPLOYMENT IS KEY – Veterans will require employment to afford housing and other basic needs and for personal fulfillment and well-being.

LEAVE NO VETERAN BEHIND – The goal is zero homeless veterans. There are strategies and resources to end homelessness for every veteran.

We have shown that we can house anyone; our challenge now is to house EVERYONE.

Secretary Shaun Donovan
US Department of Housing and Urban Development
TOOLS

ESTABLISH LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING

It is important to have a point-person who is responsible for convening stakeholders and creating forums for decision making. The sample job descriptions below describe this role, including one specifically related to veteran homelessness, and one that deals with homelessness more generally.

- Sample Veteran Homelessness Initiative Coordinator
- Sample Job Description for Community Leader for Ending Homelessness

SET CLEAR NUMERICAL GOALS AND TIMELINE
CREATE ACCOUNTABILITY

This toolkit provides an overview of system-level performance measurement.

- What Gets Measured, Gets Done

VA and HUD have different homelessness data systems. These are recommendations from four communities that successfully bridged the data and information gap.

- Best Practices: Sharing Information to End Veteran Homelessness

A proven strategy is to know every homeless veteran in the community. Registry Weeks are a way to do this.

- 100,000 Homes Resources

A 100-day Housing Challenge utilizes weekly reporting to inspire service providers to quickly re-house people experiencing homelessness. This blog post describes how a 100-day housing challenge helped galvanize communities to sharply reduce the number of homeless families in one state. While this effort was not limited to veterans, its techniques carry over.

- Virginia 100-day Housing Challenge

EMPLOY CORE, EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES

Rapid re-housing is a core strategy for ending veteran homelessness. It is funded by VA’s Supportive Services for Veteran Families program, HUD’s McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants program, and other programs.

- Core Components of Rapid Re-Housing
- Rapid Re-Housing: A History and Core Components

These five short video training modules discuss the core components of rapid re-housing in further detail.

- Rapid Re-Housing Training Modules
This toolkit was developed to help communities plan for, implement, and evaluate a coordinated assessment system.

- **Coordinated Assessment Toolkit**

If you are interested in models of coordinated assessment and entry, you can follow the 25 Cities Initiative, where you'll find criteria those communities are using to set up and/or revamp their systems.

- **25 Cities Initiative**

In these conference presentations, HUD provides direction on how to develop standards for targeting permanent supportive housing.

- **Developing System-Wide Prioritization and Targeting Standards**

Permanent supportive housing must be targeted to those homeless veterans with the most severe housing barriers. The FUSE model was developed to ensure success for homeless people with mental illness and histories of incarceration, a challenging group that often includes homeless veterans.

- **CSH's Frequent Users Systems Engagement (FUSE) Model**

**HAVE A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

Engaging and forging relationships with landlords is key to quickly housing homeless veterans. This blog post highlights landlord recruitment and engagement techniques.

- **Four Things SSVF Providers Can Do Now To Recruit Landlords**

These conference presentations provide an overview to the various employment programs for which veterans experiencing homelessness may be eligible.

- **Employment Strategies: Reducing Veteran Family Homelessness**