In January 2013, Salt Lake County officials, homeless service providers, and volunteers conducted their annual point-in-time count. What they found were only 12 chronically homeless veterans out of 241 chronically homeless individuals and 247 homeless veterans. Additionally, data show that chronic homelessness had decreased 56 percent since 2007.

Salt Lake County is Utah’s largest county with over one million residents. It is composed of 16 cities and 6 townships. Industry and technology have continued to cause population growth in the region without equal growth in housing stock. Salt Lake has an unemployment rate of 4.2 percent, significantly lower than the national average of 7.3 percent. Similarly, its vacancy rate (3.9 percent) is lower than the national average of 9.3 percent.

In 2003, a group of stakeholders participated in a policy academy on ending chronic homelessness hosted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration. Following that event both the State of Utah and Salt Lake County developed 10 year plans to end homelessness that were released in 2005 and 2006, respectively. The plans both focus heavily on permanent housing and outcomes. Political support for the plans is high and the Lieutenant Governor actively chairs the State Homeless Coordinating Committee.

**KEY INITIATIVES**

**Housing First Approach for Chronically Homeless Individuals.**

Following the 2003 policy academy, stakeholders returned to Utah and transformed the homelessness assistance system. Housing First became an integral part of both the state and county plans to end homelessness. The community as a whole adopted a Housing First philosophy and individual organizations worked internally to ensure their staff were reoriented to a Housing First program model.

In 2011, Salt Lake County officials joined the 100,000 Homes Campaign and took part in a Rapid Results Institute, a process improvement-focused “boot camp.” The boot camp emphasizes using a Housing First approach with respect to U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Veteran Affairs supportive housing (HUD-VASH) program and prioritizing resources to veterans who are chronically homeless. Since then, Salt Lake County adopted a vulnerability index as a tool to prioritize those most vulnerable and most in need of housing and conducted a registry week to identify and prioritize individuals for housing. Simultaneously, HUD-VASH vouchers and other permanent supportive housing resources were reserved for chronically homeless veterans and individuals.
Outreach and Engagement.
Volunteers of America in Utah administers three street outreach teams specifically targeting chronically homeless individuals including veterans: a three-person street outreach team that focuses on initial engagement and linking individuals to housing and services, a three-person medical outreach team, and a library outreach team. The medical outreach team is composed of an experienced outreach worker, a physician’s assistant, and a mental health professional. The library outreach team is strategically positioned to engage homeless individuals in the City’s libraries, specifically in the main City library in downtown Salt Lake City.

Co-Location of Housing and Service Resources.
In addition to adopting a Housing First model and prioritizing HUD-VASH for chronically homeless veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs co-located its Homeless Outreach Program Team at The Road Home, the county’s primary emergency shelter provider. Having VA resources on-site at the shelter creates easy access for veterans to meet with VA staff and complete applications quickly. The public housing authority orientation (for the housing vouchers), which would normally take place at the housing authority, can be done on-site. Lastly, The Road Home provides the funds needed for a security deposit via Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program funds, Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program funds, or private funding. If a veteran is determined ineligible for HUD-VASH, The Road Home proceeds with other programs such as SSVF, Shelter Plus Care, or another housing option to ensure housing placement for all chronically homeless veterans.

Housing Stabilization Services.
Once a veteran moves into housing, VA provides case management for HUD-VASH and The Road Home case manages for non-HUD-VASH veterans. VA uses two case management tracks. When a veteran first moves into housing, he/she is served by a Housing First case management team whose primary purpose is to stabilize the veteran in housing. Services are initially intense and slowly become less intense as the veteran stabilizes. Once a veteran stabilizes, he/she is transferred to a Stabilization and Management (SAM) team which consists of social workers, a peer specialist, and a vocational development specialist. If a veteran never stabilizes enough to switch to the SAM team, he/she remain with the Housing First team. Additionally, if necessary, the veteran can be moved to an alternative housing unit to prevent a veteran from returning to homelessness.

COMMUNITY PROFILE
MARK HUDGINS
Whenever you greet Mark he will proudly tell you, “My name is Mark Eugene Hudgins, I was born in Germany, the son of a colonel and a lieutenant commander.” It is this pride in his family’s military service that influenced his decision to join the Navy in 1977 in California. At some point, Mark was involved in a motorcycle accident that affected his short term memory, and he was honorably discharged. Mark spent the next 3 decades of his life on couches, camping and in shelters.

Service providers tried to engage Mark for years. His friendliness and good nature made him a constant target on the streets. Finally, a medical outreach was able to convince Mark to talk about housing. For months service providers worked to help Mark obtain documentation, including VA status and identification. Finally, things came together and Mark moved into an apartment.

Since being housed, Mark has reestablished a relationship with his daughter, with whom he had not spoken for ten years. Of his experience of moving into an apartment with the help of providers in Salt Lake County, Mark stated, “I’m glad I met all of you. I tripped over my own feet often in life, it’s my history, but you helped me pick myself up again. Thank you very much.”
OUTCOMES

Since the release of the county’s ten year plan to end chronic homelessness, chronic homelessness in Salt Lake has decreased 25 percent and chronic homelessness has decreased 56 percent from 545 chronically homeless individuals in 2007 to 241 in 2013. Since 2011, when the county refocused its emphasis on housing chronically homeless veterans, veteran homelessness and chronic homelessness among individuals has decreased 6 percent each and the January 2013 point in time count found 12 remaining chronically homeless veterans.

There are approximately 190 formerly chronically homeless veterans in permanent supportive housing in the county. And, it is currently estimated that it takes on average about two months from first contact for a chronically homeless veteran to move into a unit with a HUD-VASH voucher.

CHANGES IN HOMELESSNESS IN SALT LAKE COUNTY: 2007 TO 2013*
LOOKING FORWARD

Moving forward, Salt Lake County faces many of the same challenges that other communities across the nation face. Sequestration has cut into the availability of housing assistance resources, particularly permanent vouchers from the housing authority. Without housing assistance, ending chronic homelessness will be a greater challenge but Salt Lake is committed to providing housing opportunities to all chronically homeless individuals by the end of 2015.

Additionally, momentum could stall in Salt Lake County. As homelessness becomes less visible and prominent on the streets of the County, political and community attention to the issue may begin to fade. Keeping the movement to end homelessness alive and adequately funded will be an ongoing challenge for stakeholders.

3 http://www.homebaseccc.org/PDFs/CATenYearPlan/PastHomelessPolicyAcademies.pdf

Across the country, communities are making progress in ending homelessness. The Alliance’s Homelessness Research Institute highlights strategies, programs, and innovations in these communities in the Community Snapshot series. To learn how to end homelessness, visit www.endhomelessness.org.

The Homelessness Research Institute (HRI) is the research and education arm of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, a nonprofit organization dedicated to solving the problem of homelessness and preventing its continued growth. The goals of HRI are to build the intellectual capital around solutions to homelessness and to advance data and research to ensure that policymakers, practitioners, and the caring public have the best information about trends in homelessness and emerging solutions.