

Mayors Challenge: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q. Why should a mayor join the Mayors Challenge?

A. As laid out in Opening Doors, our nation's first strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness, we have a goal as a country to end homelessness among Veterans in 2015 – less than two years from now. And, thanks in large part to the progress we have made over the last four years, we are seeing unprecedented levels of federal commitment and investment in programs for Veterans experiencing homelessness.

However, we know that we will only end homelessness nationally by ending it locally – something that requires the continued leadership and support from mayors and other local elected officials. By publicly committing to ending Veteran homelessness in 2015, mayors will lend a powerful voice to their communities' collaboration and efforts, enabling them to build momentum to reach the finish line. Moreover, we have seen the incredibly powerful impact that national recognition has made on the efforts in communities like Phoenix and Salt Lake City, thanks to the leadership and support of their mayors toward the goal of ending Veteran homelessness.

Q. Is the goal to end all Veteran homelessness, or just chronic homelessness among Veterans and/or just homelessness among unsheltered Veterans?

A. Our goal as a nation, as laid out in Opening Doors, is to end homelessness among all Veterans in 2015. Certainly there are important milestones along the way to that goal, including ending chronic homelessness among Veterans and housing all Veterans who are unsheltered – milestones that are worth celebrating. However, the purpose of the Mayors Challenge is for mayors to publicly express their commitment and provide the leadership to implement the strategies necessary for their communities to end homelessness among all Veterans locally.

Q. How do you define “Veteran”? Does it include those who may be ineligible for Veteran Health Administration (VHA) benefits?

A: Yes, for the purposes of ending Veteran homelessness, we consider all Veterans as part of the definition – including those who are ineligible for VHA benefits.

HUD's Continuums of Care (CoCs) are charged with serving all people experiencing homelessness, including Veterans. HUD is using its 2013 and 2014 CoC funding competitions to encourage CoCs to collaborate with their local VA Medical Centers to ensure that CoC-funded providers serving Veterans prioritize those who may not be eligible to participate in VA's health care system and in VA's homeless programs and services. Both VA and HUD encourage communities to make connections at the local level between CoCs and VA Medical Centers to identify and connect Veterans to the housing and services that best meet their needs.

Q. When does the challenge begin and end?

A. *Across the country, there are mayors who have already entered the challenge, committing their communities to end Veteran homelessness in 2015. For additional communities who enter the Challenge, it begins on the day they make that commitment. Ultimately, we are all working toward the goal of ending Veteran homelessness by December 31, 2015 – as measured in the January 2016 Point in Time count.*

Q. What numbers do we use to measure progress?

A. *Ultimately, our success toward achieving the goal of ending Veteran homelessness will be measured in the January 2016 Point in Time count, with the January 2015 Point in Time count a good interim progress marker. Additionally, some communities may choose to use other strategies, like a local Veteran Stand Down event or intensive street outreach and surveying, to gauge progress toward the ultimate goal.*

Q. We don't think our PIT count is a reliable measure of our progress. Is there another way to measure it?

A. *Although we certainly understand the challenges your community may have with Point in Time counts, it is the single most consistent and reliable national measure of homelessness. While it is indeed a snapshot, it demonstrates the overall direction that homelessness is trending from year to year. To supplement the Point in Time count, some communities conduct other outreach and surveying efforts to generate updated, by-name lists of Veterans experiencing homelessness to help ensure that they are effectively reaching, and linking to housing and services, all Veterans experiencing homelessness in their communities.*

Q. How will we know when we have succeeded, and when can we claim victory?

A. *We will know we have succeeded when we have a systematic end to Veteran homelessness, which means there are no Veterans sleeping on our streets and every Veteran has access to permanent housing. Should Veterans become or be at-risk of becoming homeless, we will have the capacity to quickly connect them to the help they need to achieve housing stability. When those three things are accomplished, we can claim victory.*

Q. Where do we go to get support for our effort?

A. *You can visit <http://www.hud.gov/veterans> to find resources to help your community work strategically to achieve the goal. We have also provided a list of helpful webpages at the end of this FAQ document.*

In addition, you could consider pairing with another city, and using the Mayors Challenge as an opportunity to learn from one another and spur each other on toward achieving your goals – something that has been very successful in the case of Phoenix and Salt Lake City. If you do not wish to be paired with another city, but do wish to be connected to other mayors and communities that you can share ideas and learn from, HUD, USICH, and VA staff will assist you to identify and connect with relevant peers.

Q. How does the Mayors Challenge relate to other federal and local initiatives to end Veteran homelessness within my community?

A. Ending homelessness among Veterans, and indeed ending all forms of homelessness, is a national effort that requires the support of a variety of public and private organizations and agencies at all levels of government. Since the launch of Opening Doors, federal agencies have been implementing several targeted strategies and initiatives to help communities end homelessness among Veterans and other populations, and local communities have strengthened their efforts to achieve that goal. We do not view the Mayors Challenge as duplicative or in conflict with these other efforts, but rather as a complementary effort that can help generate public awareness and attention, increase learning and information-sharing across initiatives and communities, and help inspire even greater progress, locally and nationally. We've seen in many communities that the public commitment of mayors can help galvanize local efforts and foster more purposeful coordination of resources and strategies. If you have questions about any current federal programs or initiatives in your community, HUD, USICH and VA staff will help to connect you to the right agencies and people.

Q. How does this relate to the National League of Cities' Homeless Veteran Leadership Network?

A. We know that ending homelessness among Veterans, and indeed ending all forms of homelessness, is a national effort that requires the support of a variety of agencies and organizations. To that end, the National League of Cities is providing an additional venue to help cities achieve the goal and has developed a network for municipalities. The Homeless Veteran Leadership Network (HVLN) encourages city leaders to engage with local efforts, shares best practices with each other and offers support to increase collaboration between city leaders and local stakeholders. There are many stakeholders who want to help you reach your city's goal, and ultimately, we view all of these efforts as complimentary and supplemental to our broad, national goal of ending homelessness among Veterans in 2015.

Q. I am ready to enter the Mayors Challenge, now what?

A. We are excited that your community is committed to the goal of ending Veteran homelessness by 2015. To help support your efforts and identify effective strategies, visit <http://hud.gov/veterans> for useful documents, links, and resources. We have provided a list of helpful webpages at the end of this FAQ document.

We also encourage your community to celebrate success as you achieve critical milestones toward the goal of ending Veteran homelessness.

As we have seen with communities like Phoenix and Salt Lake City, entering into a 'friendly competition' between mayors has been an extremely effective strategy in both accelerating momentum around the goal of ending Veteran homelessness, and garnering widespread public attention and support. If your community is interested in pairing together with another community, HUD, USICH and VA can work together with you to find possible matches that might work.

For more detailed information, or to let us know what kinds of information or materials would be helpful to your local efforts, you can contact us as: MayorsChallenge@HUD.gov

Resources to Assist Communities in Ending Homelessness among Veterans

1 Identify Your Partners

[Find your Continuum of Care](#)¹ – Each geographic area is covered by a Continuum of Care (CoC), which is a group of stakeholders organized to coordinate homeless assistance resources (housing and services) and develop strategies to prevent and end homelessness within its community.

- [Connect with your VA Medical Center](#)² – The Veterans Health Administration is home to the United States' largest integrated health care system consisting of 152 medical centers that, among other things, connect Veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness to housing and services that meet their unique needs.
- [Maximize mainstream resources](#)³ – Although not specifically targeted at Veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness, programs that serve low-income people help Veterans to obtain and sustain self-sufficiency, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Supplemental Security Income, and Veterans Reemployment at Career One Stop Centers.
- *Engage local philanthropy* – Consider how to engage with philanthropic organizations in a way to maximize resources and increase progress toward ending Veteran homelessness.

2 Know Your Data

Homeless Management Information System – The Continuum of Care administers a local database of people experiencing homelessness, including Veterans. Learn more about [data on homeless Veterans](#)⁴ from VA.

- [Homeless population and subpopulation reports](#)⁵ – Continuums of Care are required to report the number of people, including Veterans, experiencing homelessness in their geography (sheltered persons annually and unsheltered persons biannually).
- [Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress](#)⁶ – Compare your local data to national estimates.

3 Use Available Resources

[Resources for Homeless Veteran Service Providers](#)⁷ – Includes current policy priorities, best practices on sharing information locally between Continuums of Care and VA medical centers, and links to additional resources.

- [Interagency work at the federal level](#)⁸ – Get up-to-date information about federal progress toward the goal, including blog posts and a solutions database of best practices to replicate in your community.
- MayorsChallenge@hud.gov – Let us know if you have any questions throughout your challenge, as well as keep us updated on your progress toward the goal.

¹ <https://www.onecpd.info/grantees/?granteesaction=main.searchresults&programid=3>

² <http://www.va.gov/health/vamc>

³ http://usich.gov/usich_resources/federal-guidance-for-mainstream-programs

⁴ http://va.gov/HOMELESS/NationalCenter_Needs_and_Interventions.asp

⁵ <https://www.onecpd.info/resource-library/coc-homeless-populations-and-subpopulations-reports>

⁶ <https://www.onecpd.info/resources/documents/AHAR-2013-Part1.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.onecpd.info/homelessness-assistance/resources-for-homeless-veteran-service-providers>

⁸ <http://usich.gov/population/veterans>

Programs to Assist Communities in Ending Homelessness among Veterans

VA Healthcare for Homeless Veterans (HCHV)

The primary mission of HCHV is to connect Veterans experiencing homelessness to needed health care and social service programs via extensive outreach, administered through VA medical centers.

VA Veterans Benefits Assistance Outreach Program

Veterans Benefits Assistance Homeless Veterans Outreach Coordinators provide VA benefits access and information through outreach efforts to Veterans who are homeless and Veterans at-risk of homelessness.

VA Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP)

HVRP is the only federal program that works specifically on employment issues for Veterans experiencing homelessness while using a client-centered case management model to connect Veterans with other social services and benefits.

VA Veterans' Workforce Investment Program

This program provides funds to assist Veterans experiencing homelessness in gaining meaningful employment through client-centered case management, including job counseling, training, and placement assistance.

VA Incarcerated Veterans' Transition Program

This program provides case management and employment counseling services to Veterans who have been incarcerated or are soon to be transitioning out of incarceration and are at risk of becoming homeless.

VA Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans

Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans is a supportive residential rehabilitation and treatment service center for Veterans experiencing homelessness with multiple and serious medical conditions, mental illness, or addiction.

VA Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem

Program funds go toward the provision and maintenance of transitional housing facilities and service centers for Veterans (Grant Program), as well as for the operational costs for services provided to Veterans while in transitional housing (Per Diem Program).

VA Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) Program

This program works with nonprofit organizations to provide social services for low-income and very low-income veterans and their families currently residing in or transitioning to permanent housing.

HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program

HUD-VASH combines HUD Housing Choice Voucher rental assistance for homeless Veterans with case management and clinical services provided by VA at VA medical centers and community-based outreach clinics.

HUD Continuum of Care (CoC) Program

This program is designed to assist individuals and families experiencing homelessness and to provide the services needed to help such individuals move into transitional and permanent housing, with the goal of long-term stability. Program funds may be used for permanent housing, transitional housing, supportive services, Homeless Management Information Systems, and, in some cases, homelessness prevention.

Learn more about these and other programs at:

<http://usich.gov/population/veterans>

<http://www.va.gov/homeless>

<http://hud.gov/veterans>