



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

STAND DOWN FOR HOMELESS VETERANS

What is a Stand Down?

In times of war, exhausted combat units requiring time to rest and recover were removed from the battlefields to a place of relative peace and security. Today, Stand Down refers to a grassroots, community-based intervention program designed to help the nation's estimated 400,000 homeless veterans "combat" life on the streets. The *hand up, not a handout* philosophy of Stand Down is carried out through the work of hundreds of volunteers and organizations across the nation.

History of Stand Down

The concept of Stand Down, as related specifically to the homeless veteran crisis, was the brainchild of two Vietnam Veterans, Robert Van Keuren and Dr. Jon Nachison. The first Stand Down was held in San Diego during the summer of 1988. Popularity of the event has steadily expanded from the original in San Diego to more than 100 communities hosting Stand Downs throughout the nation each year. It is estimated that more than 28,000 homeless veterans and their families receive assistance from Stand Downs each year.

What Happens at a Stand Down?

Hundreds of homeless veterans are provided with a broad range of necessities including food, clothing, medical services, legal and mental health assistance, job counseling and referral, and most importantly, companionship. It is a time for the community to connect with the homeless veteran population and address this crisis that affects each and every town, city and state in this country.

Who Organizes and Delivers These Services?

Hundreds of volunteers and professionals in host communities give of their time and expertise to address the unique needs of homeless veterans. Committees are formed specifically to stage most Stand Downs. Veteran service organizations, National Guard and Reserve Units, homeless shelter programs, health care providers, U.S. Departments of

Veterans Affairs and Labor staffs, veteran-helping-veteran organizations, and concerned citizens from the community organize and stage the events.

Where are Stand Downs Held?

Stand Downs occur over a three-day period, although similar homeless veteran assistance programs may last one to two days. Some events are held indoors, but the majority are held on football fields, in parks, or at other wide-open locations within the community. Ease of access is an important consideration when choosing a site.

How to Stage a Stand Down

There is no specific formula for planning and staging a Stand Down. In fact, the events reflect the uniqueness of the host community. Some offer basic services, while others offer more by including entertainment and cultural activities. Some Stand Downs are re-created to follow a regimented, military-style program, which is familiar and comforting to veterans, while others create an atmosphere of empowerment by allowing homeless veterans to elect officers.

Events are classified according to their duration and the services they provide. The major classifications of Homeless Veteran Assistance Events are:

- A. **Stand Down** – 3-day events providing shelter and the full range of support and referral services, including health, employment, housing, legal, financial, and VA benefits counseling services.
- B. **Homeless Veterans Resource Fair** – 2-day events that offer health, employment, housing, legal and VA benefits counseling services.
- C. **Homeless Veterans Resource Fair** – 1-day events that offer health, employment, housing, legal, and VA benefits counseling services.
- D. **Homeless Veterans Health Fair** – 1-day events with a primary focus on health services and referrals.
- E. **Homeless Veterans Job Fair** – 1-day events with a primary focus on employment and training services.



STAND DOWN FOR HOMELESS VETERANS

F. **Other events** – Any other homeless veteran outreach program offering assistance and referrals to services within the community.

For a list of services available at each class of Stand Down or homeless veteran assistance event, go to www.nchv.org and click on “Stand Down.” The Stand Down Guide provides resources and information about how to stage a Stand Down. The NCHV website includes a list of upcoming Stand Downs, as well as coordinators and contact information.

STEPS TO ORGANIZING A COMMUNITY STAND DOWN

1. **Identify leadership** and form a steering committee.
2. **Assess the need** for a Stand Down. Check with area homeless service providers, the local Department of Social Services, the Homeless Coordinator at your nearest VA medical center and regional Veterans Benefits Administration office, and your state Department of Veterans Affairs.
3. **Establish a lead agency** and information center to help plan, organize, publicize and stage the event.
4. **Tap into community spirit** – You will need an active corps of volunteers to ensure the success of your event. Use the local media to get the word out; contact your local faith community, veteran service organizations, civic groups and the business and health services community.
5. **Locate an acceptable site** – Consider the length of your event, availability of public facilities, space and logistical needs for the services you will provide, and food and water for your homeless veterans and staff. Make sure your inquiries include details about setting up, and more importantly, cleaning up the location after the event.
6. **Plan and Document** your event budget, action plan, method of registering homeless veteran participants and accounting for goods and services provided. Form subcommittees to see projects through and hold regularly scheduled meetings to ensure compliance with the plan. Check with your local government for information on permits and insurance requirements.
7. **Register your Stand Down event.** To include your Stand Down event in the national registry and NCHV’s newsletter and website, go to www.nchv.org/standdown.cfm and download

the Stand Down Information form. Fill out the form and return it via fax or mail to NCHV.

WHO TO CONTACT FOR SUPPORT

- **Local Agencies** – County or city social service agencies and community groups that may be able to provide information about accessing services and volunteers.
- **Federal Government Agencies** – VA, Department of Labor and HUD local offices all have programs for which homeless veterans are eligible.
- **Military Installations** – Many Stand Downs are supported by local military units. Reserve units often help by providing tents and volunteers as part of their mandatory training exercises.
- **Local Veteran Service Organizations** and civic groups can provide volunteers and valuable contacts with area merchants.
- **Chamber of Commerce** – The business community will probably be your best source of donated goods and services.
- **Health Societies and Associations** – Many communities have clinics that are staffed by volunteer health professionals.
- **Community-based Organizations**, including homeless service providers and the faith-based community.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

National Coalition for Homeless Veterans website: www.nchv.org

Stand Down – A Step by Step Procedural Manual, written by Robert Van Keuren, Dr. Jon Nachison, and Richard Talbott (original organizers). Call Vietnam Veterans of San Diego at 619-497-0142 or visit their website at www.vvsvd.net.

Homeless Coordinator at local VA Medical and VET Centers.