



NATIONAL COALITION for HOMELESS VETERANS

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Policy Statement: Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program

WASHINGTON, May 25th, 2022— The Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program, administered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, is the only national, veteran-specific program to help at-risk veterans avoid becoming homeless, and rapidly re-house those veteran families who lose their housing. The program was authorized by P.L. 110-387, the veterans' mental Health and Other Care Improvements Act of 2008, and is also the most critical resource for very low-income veterans who are able to quickly transition out of homelessness into permanent housing.

SSVF grantees are nonprofit, community-based organizations that connect very low-income veterans and their families with services in the following areas: health services, legal aid, child care, transportation, fiduciary and payee services, daily living assistance, benefits, and housing counseling. The program allows for time-limited payments to third parties – such as landlords, utility companies, moving companies, and licensed child-care providers – to ensure housing stability for veteran families at risk of losing their housing. SSVF funds are leveraged with local Continuums of Care and other community partners at no extra cost to the federal government.

In 2021, VA awarded \$418 million in SSVF grants to 260 organizations in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands. There has been additional special purpose funding from the emergency CARES and ARP laws. The CARES Act provided \$774.0 million in additional support to SSVF grantees for additional COVID-19 specific enhancements in 2020 and 2021. In FY 2021, more than 114,000 homeless and at-risk veterans and their families were served with these funds.

Why is SSVF critical?

Modeled after HUD's Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP), the SSVF Program serves low-income veterans and their families residing in or transitioning to permanent housing. The HUD-published report "HPRP: Year 1 Summary" showed that only 2% of adults served by the program were veterans, even though veterans accounted for 16% of the adult homeless population in that year. SSVF was developed to address this unmet need.

At the outset, VA's homeless programs were geared toward rehabilitation with more than half of the homeless veteran population suffering from physical disabilities, mental illness, substance abuse, or co-occurring disorders. Yet over years population needs shift, especially when programs to address a communities most acute needs are effective. Since SSVF's inception it has remained a highly and increasingly successful program; in 2021, 80,049 veterans served exited to permanent housing outcomes. Over the course of the program's lifetime, 77% of all participants have exited to permanent housing.

VA's prevention efforts are dependent upon the SSVF Program, which has become the core of the department's future homeless veteran service delivery system. With a growing and unpredictable population of at-risk OEF/OIF and now Afghanistan veterans and the aging of Vietnam-era veterans, SSVF will be the workhorse of veteran homelessness prevention programs for years to come.

More than 1.4 million American veterans live in poverty and are more vulnerable to becoming homeless than their civilian counterparts. VA research shows that one in 10 veterans living in poverty is likely to experience homelessness. In October 2011, VA and HUD released "Veteran Homelessness: A Supplemental Report to the 2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress." This report remains the last time there was a comprehensive review studying linkages between poverty and homelessness was assessed, which found that young veterans (between ages 18 and 30) in poverty are almost four times more likely to become homeless than their non-veteran counterparts in poverty. Women veterans in poverty are more than three times more likely to become homeless than women non-veterans in poverty. And more than 26% of poor African American, American Indian, and Alaska Native veterans were homeless at some point during 2010.

SSVF has played a leading role in VA's response to mitigating COVID-19 risks to vulnerable homeless Veterans. Between March 2020 and September 2021, SSVF placed nearly 32,000 Veterans in hotels/motels. These Veterans were previously unsheltered or in congregate environments that put them at increased risk of contagion. Operational slowdowns among HUD supported Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) meant that voucher issuance and completion of required inspections delayed HUD-VASH placements. Between May 2020 and August 2021, SSVF assisted 11,044 Veterans, acting as a bridge to support moves into permanent housing while awaiting PHA voucher processing.

As the COVID-19 health emergency has significantly increased the population of Veteran families at-risk of homelessness, VA is expanding SSVF's Shallow Subsidy initiative. The Shallow Subsidy provides two-years of rental assistance to very low-income Veteran households. This rental support remains the same throughout the entire two-year period regardless of changes in household income, incentivizing income growth

What should Congress do?

NCHV recommends that Congress permanently authorize the SSVF Program, and maintain the funding levels necessary to keep existing SSVF coverage operational. The program is currently funded at \$812 million through the end of FY 2022. This amount exceeds the program's current authorization due to waivers received under the CARES and ARP emergency supplementals. In order to keep gains made by the SSVF program SSVF will need to be both reauthorized and appropriated for FY 2023 and beyond.