



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

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Policy Statement: Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program

WASHINGTON, May 28th, 2024— 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 veterans 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 2023, VA awarded \$431 million in SSVF grants to 258 organizations in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands. There was additional special purpose funding from the Public Health Emergency CARES and ARP laws. The CARES Act provided \$774.0 million in additional support to SSVF grantees for additional COVID-19 specific enhancements between 2020 and 2022. In FY 2023, 115,834 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. Since SSVF's inception it has remained a highly and increasingly successful program; in 2023, 80,400 veteran households served exited to permanent

housing outcomes. Over the course of the program's year, **74% of all participants 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. SSVF played a leading role in VA's response to mitigating COVID-19 risks to vulnerable homeless Veterans. SSVF placed over 40,000 veterans in hotels/motels and is a model to be replicated across the general population. These Veterans were previously unsheltered or in congregate environments. The Public Health Emergency (PHE) significantly increased the population of Veteran families at-risk of homelessness, and VA expanded SSVF's *Shallow Subsidy* initiative nationwide. 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.

Congress should pass **H.R. 645 the *Healthy Foundations for Homeless Veterans Act, or S.1436 – Critical Health Access Resource and Grant Extensions (CHARGE) Act of 2023*** to preserve and enhance VA's proven effective Public Health Emergency program improvements for Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) from the *Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020* (P.L. 116-315). The recently introduced veteran package named the ***Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act*** would also reauthorize most of these proven provisions, yet for a more limited 2-year period.

Congress should also consider legislation that would remove SSVF's program caps while also allowing providers sufficient use of administrative fees at 15% which are currently being limited to 10%.