

Update on Homeless Interventions for Veterans- October 25, 2019

Good afternoon Madame Chairwoman and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to talk about the VA today and its efforts to end veteran homelessness.

My name is Andrew Davis and I am a Grant and Per Diem Liaison and Coordinated Entry Specialist. I work in the Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Program located at the Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center in Albuquerque.

The HCHV program manages a multitude of housing programs and interventions for the New Mexico VA Health Care System.

Our two main programs are HUD-VASH permanent supportive housing, which provides Housing Choice Vouchers and case management and Grant and Per Diem transitional housing, which is federally funded and offers case management and housing through the Veterans Integration Centers.

We also have Veterans Justice Outreach, which allows veterans to access services while in the criminal justice system, the PHLAG program or Peer Housing Location Assistance Groups which provides case management to veterans who may need assistance outside of HUD-VASH and the Respite shelter program which may benefit veterans who are deemed medically or psychologically stable upon discharge from a hospital but at-risk within the general shelter system. We also have an Employment program which works with the VA's Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) and community employment agencies, and (H-PACT) or Homeless-Patient Aligned Care Team which provides multi-disciplinary medical and psychosocial interventions to homeless veterans, and of course, we have the Outreach program, who goes out with our community partners identifying veterans currently living on the street, in shelters or hospitals. And finally, the HCHV building itself has a walk-in clinic available five days a week to address veteran housing needs. All these programs provide supplementary care to the veteran currently experiencing homelessness.

In 2018, the state-wide coordinated entry system was able to identify 332 new veterans experiencing homelessness, averaging roughly 27 new veterans monthly.

In 2019, we have seen an increase to roughly 34 new verified veterans accessing monthly.

So, what is the VA doing about the homeless veteran in New Mexico?

Speaking for Albuquerque, it's great that the question doesn't have to remain in the abstract. We have a strong Continuum of Care with a Coordinated Entry system in place that finds, identifies, screens, offers housing, puts into programs and assists in their goal of permanent housing. We have HUD-VASH case managers offering vouchers and our community partners Goodwill Industries and Veterans Integration Centers offering Rapid Rehousing through the federally funded SSVF Program. Other agencies are Heading Home which houses our Respite clients, and Hopeworks and First Nations Community Healthsource to name a few who go out with VA Outreach as part of COAST, the Crisis Outreach and Support Team with assistance from the Albuquerque Police (APD).

The same goes for New Mexico's Balance of State CoC, which utilizes our outlying HUD-VASH case managers in Santa Fe, Taos, Farmington, Gallup, Zuni tribal lands, Artesia and Durango, CO. Not to mention our (CBOCs) or Community-Based Outpatient Clinics in areas like Espanola, Raton, Silver City, Alamogordo, Las Cruces, Clovis, Hobbs and Truth or Consequences. And of course, the VA still relies heavily on Goodwill and the VIC as well as other local access points for our veterans.

Looking at permanent housing figures, we saw 352 veterans housed this year. 122 of them were from HUD-VASH vouchers. This year we are hoping to increase that number.

And over a five-year period from 2014-2018 we have seen over 1750 veterans go into permanent housing.

We currently have 360 veterans in the HUD-VASH program.

To end veteran homelessness it takes a village and staying connected to our partners in the communities across New Mexico, in a strategic way, identifying whatever access point a veteran may arrive at, as well as attending monthly meetings, sharing outreach duties, participating in community events all strengthen our network bound by this common goal. In short, The VA has some great programs and HCHV has a great team, but we are not nearly as strong without our community partners, and veterans are much better off as a result.