



A literature review on this topic revealed the following practices to be evidence based and effective. The intention of this review is to substantiate best practices in HVRPs with research findings in the professional workforce development literature, such as they exist and are relevant to the HVRP population. Where research is limited or not directly about veterans or homeless populations, inferences were made to inform HVRP practices.



WHAT WORKS?

Research at Your Fingertips

ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS WITH TRANSITIONAL AND PERMANENT HOUSING: THE EVIDENCE

A 35 percent drop in homelessness among veterans occurred between 2009 and 2015 (Henry, Shivji, de Sousa, & Cohen, 2015). Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Julian Castro attributes this progress to local communities' adoption of "smart policies like housing first" (Aleem, 2015). Housing First offers permanent, affordable housing as quickly as possible to individuals experiencing homelessness, followed by supportive services in mental and physical health, substance abuse, education, and employment necessary for retaining that housing. The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) recommends that programs and organizations use Housing First in both short and long-term interventions (n.d., *Housing first*).

Despite the promise of Housing First, challenges remain. A survey of frontline staff who were directly involved with Housing First found this intensive approach to housing difficult, partially due to competitive rental markets, lack of funding for move-in costs, and the need for coordinating with housing authorities (Austin et al., 2014). In fact, lack of affordable housing in high-cost locations such as Massachusetts and Washington, D.C. spurred substantial increases (40 percent and 46 percent, respectively) in total homelessness between 2007 and 2014 (Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, 2015).

Pursuant to Housing First's principle of considering everyone "housing ready," service providers—including Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) grantees—must be prepared to offer that housing (HUD Exchange, 2014). Establishing partnerships with housing providers is integral to this process, especially during times of limited affordable housing options. Such partnerships can reduce delays in locating and obtaining housing, decrease time spent homeless, and increase housing choices for veterans (HUD, 2015). Findings of a literature review on establishing partnerships with housing providers are presented below.

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The Role of Housing

Prior to exploring partnerships, it is important to understand the role of various housing options. Recognizing the “reciprocal, beneficial relationship between employment and housing,” HRVP grantees provide referral and access to both transitional and permanent housing (National Coalition for Homeless Veterans [NCHV], n.d., *Best practices...*). Transitional housing programs provide temporary housing (up to 24 months), combined with wrap-around services to help individuals experiencing homelessness gain stability in their lives. Permanent housing has no designated duration, and inhabitants have full tenancy rights. They are allowed to stay in the home, even if or when any assistance they receive ends.

Since the rise in popularity of Housing First, transitional housing has come under increased scrutiny. It has been suggested that too often transitional housing serves as a “waiting area” for people whose only barrier to being permanently re-housed is a lack of affordable housing. However, both the National Alliance to End Homelessness and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) acknowledge the value of transitional housing to those who need immediate support during re-housing, but do not qualify for permanent supportive housing (PSH) (National Alliance to End Homelessness, Inc. n.d.; Oliva, 2013).

Rapid Rehousing (RRH) is a type of permanent housing that emphasizes housing search and relocation services and short- and medium-term rental assistance to move homeless people as rapidly as possible into permanent housing. It is a model funded through the Continuum of Care (CoC) Program and the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program. There are two types of subsidies offered: short-term rental assistance of up to 3 months and long-term rental assistance of 4 to 24 months. An overview of the differences between ESG-RRH and CoC-RRH can be found on the [HUD Exchange](#).

PSH is for people with disabilities experiencing homelessness who are in need of housing assistance and support services on a long-term basis. Frequently, serious behavioral health needs and chronic medical problems interfere with their ability to maintain housing.

Of veterans experiencing homelessness, 50 percent have serious mental illnesses and 70 percent have substance use disorders—far higher than among the general homeless population (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, n.d.). As many as 85 percent of veterans experiencing homelessness have at least one chronic medical problem, including heart disease, hypertension, and diabetes (National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans, 2013).

All participants in HVRP do not require the long-term support associated with PSH, but understanding the specific needs of the client population will help programs determine what housing partnerships are needed. Conducting an internal audit of who needs to be housed and what housing is needed, what housing resources already exist, and who will do the work of securing housing supports can provide direction to partnership-building (NCHV, n.d., *Converting foreclosed . . .*).

Stay Informed

There are a host of agencies, ranging from nonprofit and public sector to private sector, with whom to form partnerships (NCHV, n.d., *Converting foreclosed . . .*). The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) recommends that HVRP grantees “stay informed of all opportunities and changes in housing resources from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), other agencies, and the philanthropy community.” As a best practice, NCHV suggests having a working knowledge of changes in programs, planning, and environments; of intersections between HVRP and veteran-specific and mainstream resources; and of various private resources that support housing goals of veterans experiencing homelessness (NCHV, n.d., *Best practices . . .*).

Connect to Continuums of Care

An important vehicle for staying abreast of developments in housing is the regional or local CoC, which is a planning body that coordinates housing and services funding provided by HUD for people experiencing homelessness (NCHV, n.d., *Best practices . . .*; NCHV, n.d., *Converting foreclosed . . .*). CoCs are required to establish a coordinated entry system that ensures that all people experiencing homelessness have fair and equal access to assistance based on their needs and strengths, regardless of where they present for services (HUD Exchange, n.d.; Thompson, 2015). Of the many tasks associated with promoting a community-wide commitment to ending homelessness, the CoC provides funds to rapidly re-house people and conducts the counts of people experiencing homelessness and services that determine future funding and re-direction of services (HUD Exchange, 2012; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2010). It can also prioritize vacancies in programs it funds to veterans experiencing homelessness (HUD, 2015). Serving on the CoC itself or on its board can open doors to new partnerships (NCHV, n.d., *Best practices . . .*).

Leverage Other Federal Housing Programs

Ties to housing contacts within the HUD-appointed CoC should be complemented by relationships within the VA Medical Center. Leveraging VA housing resources is noted as a key strategy for building strong housing partnerships (HUD, 2015). The VA offers the Grant and Per Diem (GPD) program, which funds emergency and transitional housing programs for veterans experiencing homelessness. It is good practice for HVRP grantees to match assessment and enrollment schedules to the demands on GPD programs (NCHV, n.d., *Best practices . . .*).

The VA also provides rental assistance vouchers through the HUD-Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program and supportive services to very low-income veteran families transitioning to permanent housing through its Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program (HUD, 2015).

It is important, however, to clearly understand program eligibility requirements, because veterans participating in either HUD-VASH or SSVF cannot be living in permanent housing at the time of enrollment in HVRP. Veterans *already* enrolled in HVRP are allowed to move into HUD-VASH housing units, so working relationships with HUD-VASH liaisons is valuable for facilitating quick HVRP enrollment. Likewise, regular contact with SSVF representatives should be maintained, because veterans who are at imminent risk of losing their permanent housing may be eligible for SSVF (NCHV, n.d., *Best practices . . .*).

HVRP programs are also encouraged to access the food and shelter programs offered by the Federal Emergency Management Administration (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015).

Reach out to Public Housing Agencies

HUD strongly encourages engagement with public housing agencies (PHAs) as a partner in community-wide efforts to end homelessness (HUD, n.d., *CoC and . . .*). The NCHV notes that “PHAs represent the central component of any affordable housing program . . . and can serve as a valuable resource” (NCHV, n.d., *Converting foreclosed . . .*). The local PHA can provide information on affordable housing for veterans to HVRP grantee staff; conversely, the same staff, through participation in the CoC, can help PHAs with applications and briefings, housing navigation, and inspections, thereby reducing the administrative burden associated with housing vouchers (Oliva, 2015; HUD, n.d., *The business case . . .*).

PHAs have the authority to create waiting list preferences based on local housing needs (HUD, 2015). When waiting lists are very long, this authority can help target the most vulnerable people in the community. Preferences might include veterans, people with disabilities, people who are experiencing chronic homelessness, or people who have been referred by a partnering homeless services organization (USICH, n.d., *Establishing wait . . .*). Becoming familiar with the operations and language of the local PHA is the first step to identifying partnership opportunities (HUD, n.d., *CoC and . . .*).

Acquire Housing

Despite increasing use of waiting list preferences, public housing in many communities is geared toward single parents with dependent children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. This puts veterans experiencing homelessness, 97 percent of whom have no dependents (Henry et al., 2015), at a disadvantage when accessing public housing. With the advent of programs such as the nonprofit National Community Stabilization Trust, it may be possible for HVRP programs to acquire foreclosed and abandoned properties as housing options for veterans experiencing homelessness (NCHV, n.d., *Converting foreclosed . . .*). For example, HVRP grantee New Directions, Inc. in California works with the City of Los Angeles to acquire foreclosed properties that will provide housing for veterans (NCHV, 2012).

Engage Landlords

In the effort to access housing, numerous sources highlight the importance of engaging landlords, property managers, developers, and real estate professionals (Oliva, 2015; HUD, 2015; National Alliance to End Homelessness, n.d.). This may involve establishing a landlord advisory group, identifying housing champions, or conducting a marketing campaign to recruit landlords.

Of the many strategies offered to streamline access to housing, few have been studied in terms of impact. One exception, however, is the Landlord Liaison Project (LLP) in King County, Washington. This project created incentives for landlords to relax their screening criteria. To encourage consideration of potential renters who would ordinarily not be accepted due to risk of non-payment or property damage, landlords are guaranteed a rapid response to their concerns, access to a 24-hour call-in line, and risk reduction funds to cover damages that exceed security deposits. Initial evaluation results indicated that 85 percent of the landlords participating in LLP would not have rented without the LLP, and that 96 percent of the LLP clients remained in their housing at least 6 months after moving in (USICH, n.d., *Partnering with landlords . . .*).

Landlords also indicated that the primary incentive for their participation in LLP was the financial guarantee. Philanthropic organizations, community businesses, and veterans' service organizations should be considered potential sources of support in minimizing landlord risk (HUD, 2015).

Incorporate Technology

Landlord engagement was one of two key elements that a group of private real estate professionals used to help Atlanta, Georgia, address homelessness; the other element involved using technology to increase housing placements. The Atlanta Real Estate Collaborative's initiative *Open Doors* built a live feed of information that provides daily updates of unit availability. The Corporation for Supportive Housing in Chicago and Indiana developed a similar web-based tool that generates a ranked list of housing options based on information found in most agency intake forms. With these tools, service providers spend less time researching potential housing units. Tools have also been created to allow people to apply for tenancy at multiple locations with a single form (Oliva, 2015).

Consider Master Leasing

Master leasing, in which an organization leases an entire building or group of apartments in order to sublets units to individual households, is another approach to engaging landlords. The "master tenant" is responsible for day-to-day maintenance, management, and tenant selection, in addition to submitting one monthly rent check to the owner of the building, who takes care of renovation and repairs. Although master tenants assume the risk of tenant nonpayment or damage, this arrangement provides an opportunity for high-risk tenants to demonstrate their reliability. Veterans Marching Forward, in Denver, Colorado, houses veterans participating in HVRP who secure jobs at no cost for up to 3 months through master leases funded by the County Veteran Service Office (NCHV, 2012).

Commit Staff Time to Housing

In a best practice profile of employment assistance programs compiled by NCHV, the Veterans Outreach Center (VOC) in Rochester, New York, a long-standing HVRP grantee, lists housing as a key strategy. The importance of housing drives VOC's assertion that HVRP grantees should dedicate at least a part-time individual to developing relationships with landlords and other housing providers (NCHV, n.d., *Homeless Veterans* . . .). VOC itself has a full-time staff person

entirely devoted to developing housing support for HVRP participants and assisting with other aspects of housing (NCHV, 2012). One VA facility implementing a Housing First approach trains peer specialist veterans to negotiate with landlords (Austin, et al., 2014). Many rapid re-housing and Housing First programs retain dedicated housing specialists on staff to provide one-on-one assistance in finding housing, signing leases, moving into apartments, etc.

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