



HOMELESS VETERAN HEARING TESTIMONY

The Subcommittee on Insurance, Housing and Community Opportunity will hold a hearing entitled “Housing for Heroes: Examining How Federal Programs Can Better Serve Veterans,” at 9:30 a.m. on Friday, September 14, 2012, in Room 2128 of the Rayburn House Office Building.

The Subcommittee is interested in examining barriers that homeless and low-income veterans face in securing housing assistance and services from federal agencies. This hearing also will explore suggestions to improve federal agency collaboration, program efficiencies, and the administration of homeless housing and services for veterans. Your statement should address the following topics:

1. Recent, successful homeless and low-income veterans housing initiatives;

Chicago based, “A Safe Haven” is a nationally recognized model for social business enterprise. Since 1994, A Safe Haven in coordination with affiliated social business enterprises, has successfully transitioned over 40,000 homeless individuals and families (Veterans representing 15% of that population) to sustainable self-sufficiency. The methodology utilized incorporates and integrates a comprehensive continuum of care that includes treatment, housing, supportive services, job training and job placement.

Since 2010, A Safe Haven has contracted with the Veterans Administration to serve as a resource for transitional housing, per diem housing and affordable housing. This partnership has delivered housing services to over 1200 Veterans in the last 18 months.

2. Obstacles to federal agencies’ collaboration to effectively administer housing and services for homeless and low-income veterans;

The obstacles to Federal Agencies to effectively serve Veterans needs derive from the fact that Homeless Veterans face a myriad of challenges that leads to homelessness and chronic homelessness. Federal agencies fail to coordinate and collaborate resources among agencies to identify, address and deliver services to meet the individual Veteran’s needs. This is leading to fragmentation of services and a revolving door effect. Obstacles include the following:

- Separate program directives prohibit alignment of services to be delivered to the participant.
- Program funding criteria may limit effective collaboration with community based services that can fill the gaps in the support delivery system.
- Funding of services can be fragmented.

- The ability to expand the utilization of community based programs is subjected to a cumbersome approval process that prohibits the agencies from aligning the delivery system.
 - Specific limitations on the number of days a participant is allowed in a program often does not provide a sufficient time period to effectuate a long-term change; especially for treatment for addictions and for support service delivery in transitional housing programs.
3. Obstacles that homeless and low-income veterans face in securing housing assistance and services from federal programs;
- Bureaucracy is often difficult for the Veteran to navigate. The time between presentation for services and the actual delivery can be lengthy leading to the Veteran becoming frustrated and disengaged.
 - The ability to engage Veterans where they need the services does not always correlate to the location of the VAMC or VA service center.
 - Rental conditions and inspection periods that are placed on housing providers often delay the placement of the Veteran. In addition, the current system places more of the financial risk of the rental on the provider making the Veteran a difficult placement.
 - Voucher systems parameters are not aligned with housing providers that offer support services. These providers are in the best position to coordinate service delivery to the placed veteran to insure permanent sustainable housing. Generally, the VA requires services be received at the VA service center.
 - The application process can be cumbersome for a Veteran to qualify for housing, causing delays. Many housing options do not address the needs of Veterans with dependents—or only the veteran is covered for services.
 - Housing options need to be more directly aligned to the level of support services required by the Veteran. Independent housing providers will not risk capital assets on individuals who are not stabilized, or in the process of receiving connected support services.
 - Current rapid housing models are generally not supported by rental housing providers; unless there is a required support service delivery system in place.

Without such services Veterans are in jeopardy of not being able to sustain the housing option.

- Programs for Veteran heads of households are limited in availability.
4. Obstacles that non-profit entities and other service providers face in helping homeless and low-income veterans secure housing assistance and services from federal programs; and
- The time from approval of programs to actual delivery of services is often delayed due to a cumbersome inspection and contract process. Information requests are often duplicated and would benefit from a more streamlined and coordinated system.
 - Inspections of developments are not coordinated with local rules and approvals, thus creating a separate approval process. Alignment of the project/facility inspection to be more in line with local rules will speed up the project development process.
 - Veteran's benefits would be improved by more direct alignment with actual needs. Benefits should be structured to reach a specific goal and therefore allow for expenditures that are inherent in obtaining the stated goal. Reimbursing program funding for necessary costs such as transportation for the veteran while obtaining housing, job training or support services---all of which, if effectively delivered, lead to stabilized housing.
 - VAMC' should be incentivized for coordinating and utilizing effective community based services that are directly aligned with housing and other services.
 - The service delivery system would benefit from proactive service delivery which will reduce the cost of reactive service delivery. Veterans are often not accountable for the services they receive.
5. Suggestions for improvements to federal housing programs to better serve homeless and low-income veterans.
- Utilize community-based services that are experienced and have a proven track record in providing services to this special population.
 - Issue project based vouchers which will attract quality, experienced landlords and incentivize them to lease to special and high risk populations. Establish a rental system that aligns the goals of the housing provider, the funding agency and the Veteran.

- Encourage a culture of cooperation and partnership between the VAMC's and community providers who work on behalf of the homeless veterans in helping them achieve self-sufficiency and/or highest level of independent living.
- Require homeless veterans to participate in recommended support service programs as a condition of maintain their vouchers.
- Federal agencies should partner with community based providers that demonstrate the ability to individually case manage, assess and coordinate service delivery with an integrated, comprehensive continuum of care that may include community based treatment, job training, job placement and affordable housing. Federal agencies should coordinate the delivery system of services with these providers in order to provide better focus on key issues of suicide prevention, PTSD treatment, mental health issues and other disabilities that are prevalent to the Veteran population.
- Provide housing for homeless Veterans men and women and their dependents.
- Extend the time frame of housing through the transitional program to a minimum of 90-120 days. Studies show in order to learn new habits a person must begin to practice the new habits for a minimum of 90 days.
- Allow flexibility on the service delivery protocols for Veterans to be assessment driven.
- Establish benchmarks and implement performance metrics to allow the Federal Agencies to evaluate programs both internal and community based service delivery. Performance based budgeting will support programs and agencies that consistently deliver sustainable successful outcomes.
- The ultimate goal for the veteran is to achieve independence, self-sufficiency, family reunification, building new social networks with Veterans and mainstream society. These goals can only be accomplished by collaboration and partnership between the Government and the community.

Submitted by:
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