

Achieving an End to Veteran Homelessness in Delaware

A Report from the State Working Group



I. Introduction

On Veterans Day, November 11, 2016, Governor Markell, alongside Vice President Joe Biden and Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Julián Castro, announced that Delaware was one of three states to successfully and effectively end veteran homelessness. This accomplishment was achieved by dedicated and thoughtful leaders at the local, regional, and state levels all working with one another, across institutions and systems of care, to ensure that every veteran in Delaware has a safe place to call home.

In January 2015, Governor Markell announced his intention to join the national Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness in his State of the State address. He charged Delaware State Housing Authority (DSHA) Director Anas Ben Addi and Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) Secretary Rita Landgraf with developing a plan to achieve this goal, then unveiled the State's plan and formally signed on to the Challenge in May 2015.

"It has been a great inspiration to me to see so many good people work so hard to bring federal, state, local and private resources together to ensure that in Delaware no homeless veteran has to remain homeless for very long ever again."

-Bill Farley-
Chairman, Delaware Commission of
Veterans Affairs

A state working group was convened to lead the effort at the state level, and local teams formed in each County to bring together local players.

From January 2015 – January 2017 453 homeless veterans in Delaware moved from homelessness to permanent housing.

On October 20, 2016, Delaware was notified by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), HUD, and the VA that it had effectively ended veteran homelessness.

Effectively ending veteran homelessness does not mean that no veteran will ever experience homelessness again. Rather, this means that our community has a sustainable and systematic response in place that ensures homelessness among veterans is prevented whenever possible, or is otherwise a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience.

II. Primary Activities

1. State and Local Team Work

Throughout Delaware steering committees and working groups were formed to take on the challenge to end homelessness among veterans. In Dover, Mayor Christiansen told community members that "failure is not an option," and he charged local leaders with doing whatever needed to be done to meet the challenge for our heroes at home. A "Welcome Home Team" quickly formed in Dover to make sure that all homeless veterans in Dover were known by name and connected to services and permanent housing quickly.

In Sussex County a steering committee formed to raise awareness of the issue and to help recruit local landlords to participate in the challenge by renting housing units to homeless veterans. New Castle County also formed a steering committee that included representation from both the New Castle County government and City of Wilmington government. This committee performed landlord outreach through the Delaware Apartment Association, coordinated with Salesianum School to collect and distribute “Welcome Home” supplies for homeless veterans moving into housing, and monitored progress locally towards the goal.

A Statewide Working Group met bi-monthly during 2015 and 2016. This group included representation from Veteran service organizations, state-level departments (like the Delaware State Housing Authority and Department of Health and Social Services), the CoC Lead Agency (Homeless Planning Council), HUD regional representatives, local housing authorities, the Wilmington VA Medical Center (WVAMC), Delaware Commission of Veterans Affairs, and others. This group focused on using data to monitor statewide progress towards ending veteran homelessness, identifying new strategies and opportunities, reviewing best practice from other communities, and developing statewide policy initiatives to help local service providers house veterans more quickly. There was not a community in the state that was not actively working towards the same goal.

State Working Group Members

Connections CSP, Inc.
Delaware Commission of Veterans Affairs
Delaware State Housing Authority
Delaware Department of Health and Social Services
Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (DSAMH)
Division of State Service Centers
Division of Services for Aging and Adults with Physical Disabilities (DSAAPD)
Housing Alliance Delaware (Homeless Planning Council)
New Castle County
Sussex County
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
Veterans Multi-Service Center
Wilmington Housing Authority
Wilmington VA Medical Center

2. Statewide Master List of Veterans Experiencing Homelessness

Delaware is committed to knowing every homeless veteran by name, and ensuring that the veteran and his or her family are connected quickly to an available housing resource. Following best practices, Delaware developed a master list that includes all veterans experiencing homelessness. This information is gathered through the use of Delaware’s coordinated entry system (Centralized Intake), data from the Community Management Information System (CMIS), the WVAMC, and local outreach workers and service providers. The Homeless Planning Council manages the master list of homeless veterans in Delaware.

Veterans who become newly homeless are immediately added to the list – by name – and referred to a local SSVF program (Supportive Service for Veteran Families) for housing location and case management services. When a homeless veteran moves into permanent housing, the veteran is considered a housing success and is removed from the master list of homeless veterans. Progress towards housing all veterans is tracked and reported to community partners on a monthly basis.

I was homeless for approximately 2 years. I did not find the program, but was recruited by Gary [an SSVF outreach worker for Connections Community Support Programs] in the parking lot of Redner's Supermarket as a few snowflakes fell. I was already convinced that I couldn't find housing, it would take years if ever, and if I did find it I couldn't afford it. I had given up looking. After being skillfully approached by Gary he was able to convince me that all was not lost and there really was help for me if I was willing to make an effort. After an appointment at Gary's office I was introduced to Beth and she told exactly what I had to do and by when. After doing what they told me, within an unbelievably short amount of time I had a beautiful apartment that I could afford and a line on a possible job, which I got later. Beth stepped in and set up appointments to check on my progress and give me any assistance I needed. All this was done without ever making me feel ashamed or demeaned in any way. I will be forever grateful. Thanks Gary and Beth.

3. Statewide Veteran Housing Provider Meetings

Providers of permanent housing for homeless veterans meet twice per month. At these meetings the statewide master list is reviewed by name. Providers share updates on their cases, discuss housing and service challenges, and brainstorm solutions to ensure that each person is able to be successful in housing. These meeting included Delaware's two SSVF providers – Connections Community Support Programs and Veterans Multiservice Center – who provide rapid re-housing assistance and homeless prevention to veterans and their families - the WVAMC, and the CoC Lead.

The system in place focuses on 3 main strategies:

- a) Quickly identifying every homeless veteran and veteran family in Delaware by name,
- b) Assessing the needs of each veteran and immediately offering them permanent housing, and
- c) Quickly connecting them to permanent housing and appropriate services.

III. Major Accomplishments & Local Initiatives

From January 2015 – January 2017 **453 homeless veterans moved from homelessness to permanent housing** – 80% of all veterans who experienced homelessness during this time. Furthermore, 50 chronically homeless¹ veterans were permanently housed during this time. This was possible due to unprecedented interagency coordination, the adoption best practices, and the creation of a housing first system that works to quickly re-house each person regardless of their needs, histories, or perceived housing barriers. During this time, Delaware implemented a number of strategic initiatives that helped us to achieve this level of success.

1. Vets Count Delaware

In November, 2015 Delaware conducted Vets Count Delaware – a 3-day and 3-night statewide effort to ensure that all homeless veterans in Delaware were identified. Teams of volunteers canvassed locations throughout the state where people are known or likely to sleep outdoors, as well as shelters and service sites where data is not regularly collected. As a result of this coordinated outreach effort, homeless veterans who were not on the statewide master list were identified and connected to services and housing.

¹ A chronically homeless individual (or head of household) that has been living in emergency shelters or on the streets for 12 months continuously or 12 months cumulatively during 4 or more homeless episodes of homelessness in 3 years, and who has a disabling condition that is expected to be of long or indefinite duration and impacts their ability to live independently.

2. Data Sharing Across Systems

A major accomplishment and component of our local success was our ability to develop methods of data sharing across systems, particularly across the Continuum of Care and the Department of Veterans Affairs. A data sharing agreement that complies with the confidentiality requirements of each system was developed and continues to be implemented. Data regarding the VA eligibility status of homeless veterans and their housing needs are shared on a bi-weekly basis to ensure that veterans are accessing the housing and services for which they are eligible in the VA and the Continuum of Care systems.

3. Data-driven Decision Making

Achieving an effective end to veteran homelessness in Delaware would not have been possible without the ability to measure the need, set specific goals, track progress, and report success. Throughout Delaware providers of homeless services, local working groups, and the Continuum of Care adopted a data driven approach to the work. Local and statewide goals were set, called "100 day challenges." These challenges set housing targets based on the number of homeless veterans in the community. For example, the Dover Welcome Home Team kicked off the challenge in 2015 by setting the goal of permanently housing 40 homeless veterans in Kent County in 100 days. The team achieved, and exceeded, this target.

No veteran should be left without a place to turn, and our systems are working together to make sure they can get help quickly and effectively. It's been an honor and a pleasure to work with so many of the veterans and groups serving veterans in Delaware. With the right strategies, resources and collaboration, we can have a real impact on homelessness.

Anas Ben Addi, Director
Delaware State Housing Authority

4. SRAP Vets Set Aside

The Delaware State Housing Authority (DSHA) and the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) administer SRAP, the State Rental Assistance Program. This is a state-funded rental voucher program targeted to particularly vulnerable populations, including people with diagnosed mental illnesses and disabilities. DSHA administers the housing voucher, and DHSS provides access to case management and services and screens for eligibility.

As a contribution toward the challenge, DSHA and DHSS set aside 20 SRAP vouchers to provide housing subsidies to homeless veterans in need, particularly those who were ineligible for other housing programs. The SRAP Vets program successfully housed 19 homeless veterans in 2016, and 20 vouchers have been set aside for homeless veterans in 2017.

5. Maximizing and Expanding Housing Resources

HUD-VASH Graduation Program

HUD-VASH is a rental assistance program funded by HUD and the VA at the federal level. HUD provides the housing subsidy, and the VA provides access to case management and services. The vouchers and services are administered locally by the WVAMC and Wilmington Housing Authority. HUD-VASH is intended to serve homeless veterans who need access to ongoing intensive services to remain stably housed.

Some veterans who enter the VASH program may stabilize in housing and no longer need the intensive services provided by the VA. In an effort to free up more HUD-VASH resources for homeless veterans in need, the VA identified 20 veterans in the HUD-VASH program who no longer needed intensive services. In a partnership with the New Castle County Housing Authority, these veterans were moved on to a Housing Choice Voucher (HCV), and HUD-VASH was used

April 2017

to house 20 more homeless veterans in need. All of the Public Housing Authorities in Delaware have agreed to participate in the VASH Move-On program. This program ensures the effective use of our most costly resources by targeting the most intensive assistance to those who need it most.

Prioritizing Homeless Veterans

The Dover Housing Authority set a priority for veterans on their Housing Choice Voucher waiting list, and housed a homeless veteran through their HCV program. Seven more homeless veterans were housed by the Dover Housing Authority in tax credit or public housing units. Other housing authorities in Delaware also implemented a veteran priority for their Housing Choice Vouchers.

Permanent supportive housing (PSH) resources are dedicated to serving people in Delaware experiencing chronic homelessness, and include a permanent housing subsidy paired with intensive and flexible support services. The Delaware Continuum of Care (CoC) revised Delaware's PSH standards to include a priority for chronically homeless veterans. As a result, 10 chronically homeless veterans who were ineligible for other permanent supportive housing interventions through the VA were housed by CoC PSH providers.

Maximizing Federal and State Resources

Delaware has two SSVF providers, Connections Community Support Programs and the Veterans Multiservice Center, that implement homeless prevention and rapid re-housing for veterans who are homeless and at-risk of homelessness. Rapid re-housing provides homeless veterans with assistance locating affordable housing in the community, financial assistance (such as security deposit and short-term rental assistance), and case management to help them increase their incomes and stabilize in housing. These programs are funded by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. From Nov. 2015 – Oct. 2016 Delaware leveraged \$1,874,540.00 in federal SSVF funds to assist homeless and at-risk veterans with rapid re-housing and homeless prevention.

The Delaware Center for Homeless Veterans (DCHV) applied for and was awarded 40 project-based HUD-VASH vouchers to permanently house 40 high-need homeless veterans at the new Pearl Center in Wilmington, DE. This project is currently under development, and is also leveraging funding through other federal and state resources such as the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program and the Downtown Development District program.

6. Mobilizing the Community

Working groups throughout Delaware made sure that community partners were engaged in the effort by getting the word out. Senator Carper and Governor Markell published Public Service Announcements, and other PSAs were run for free on radio stations in Sussex County. The New Castle County TV station held sessions on public television about the challenge and how local landlords could help. Informational cards were developed, printed, and handed out to homeless veterans across the state as a quick guide to homeless assistance resources.

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Delaware Housing Search (www.delawarehousingsearch.org) was updated to promote affordable rentals for homeless veterans. These changes made it possible for private landlords in Delaware to sign up as interested in renting to homeless veterans in need of housing, and for homeless veterans in need of housing to be able to contact those landlords directly. Direct outreach was also conducted to private landlords through the Delaware Apartment Association.

The Sussex County working group came up with the idea for a business card to hand out to homeless veterans throughout Delaware that included 1 phone number that they could call for assistance. This card was distributed to homeless veterans throughout the state, both on the streets and in homeless service provider shelters and programs.

IV. What We Have Learned

Implementing an effective end to homelessness among veterans was not easy work, but here in Delaware we rose to the occasion. In the process we learned many lessons about what works to successfully resolve homelessness and how we can better implement solutions.

We learned that:

- Successfully ending homelessness requires policy level leadership and on-the-ground direct service providers working collaboratively to achieve shared goals across sectors, including the non-profit sector, elected officials, faith-based organizations, and grassroots volunteers.
- Coordination and information-sharing across agencies and across systems of care are essential to ensuring that our processes are consistent, effective, and prevent people from falling through cracks.
- Essential to our success is our ability to know – at the community level – each homeless veteran in Delaware on a by-name basis and regularly track their progress towards housing. We used by-name as well as high-level data to track progress at both the individual and community levels, and to regularly share and discuss this progress among key stakeholders. Using a data-driven approach made it possible for us to plan for, and measure, our successes.
- We need to set lofty goals and move towards those goals with a sense of urgency. We do not have the time to take our time when it comes to ending homelessness. People are in living in crisis now, and it is possible to help each one of them be successful in permanent housing.
- Leadership by top local, state and federal government officials helped to bring visibility, motivation, and a sense of urgency to the issue. Buy in and support from public leadership is an essential component to local success.
- Active participation from landlords in the private housing market have made all of this possible. Partnerships with landlords in the private housing market will continue to be central the work of ending homelessness.

V. Where do we go from here?

We have developed a system that can more quickly and effectively respond to veteran homelessness. However, there are still approximately 100 veterans experiencing homelessness in Delaware on any given day. It is estimated that approximately 3,500 people – including children – will sleep on the streets or in shelters in Delaware each year.

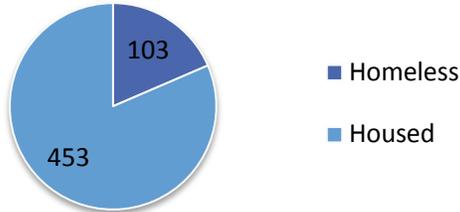
We cannot afford to stop this work, or even to slow down. Maintaining momentum is essential to sustaining our successes in addressing veteran homelessness and move forward towards effectively ending homelessness for all people in Delaware. Working groups throughout the state should continue to meet regularly and work hard. Specifically, the state working group should continue to have quarterly or bi-annual meetings to ensure that the state keeps focused veteran homelessness.

Going forward, Delaware should:

- Take what we have learned in ending veteran homelessness and bring those strategies to bear on ending homelessness for all Delawareans.
- Ensure that homeless assistance providers have the information and support that they need continue to provide low barrier services using a housing first approach.
- Actively work to expand the network of participating landlords.
- Determine strategies for improving street outreach to ensure that all homeless veterans are identified and quickly offered housing.
- Continue to maintain a by-name master list of homeless veterans in Delaware and utilize data to ensure continued progress.

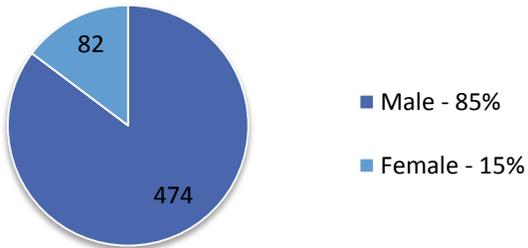
APPENDIX: Data about Veteran Homelessness in Delaware

1. Homeless Veterans in Delaware: January 2015-January 2017



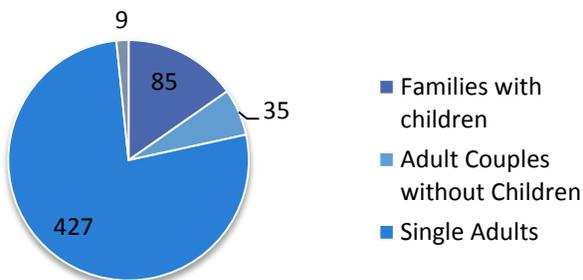
From January 2015 to January 2017 a total of 556 veterans experienced homelessness in Delaware. Of this number, 453 homeless veterans moved into permanent housing and 103 veterans are currently experiencing homelessness. Three people are chronically homeless and are in the process of moving into permanent housing. Since January 2015, Delaware has successfully housed 80% of all veterans experiencing homelessness.

2. Homeless Veterans by Gender



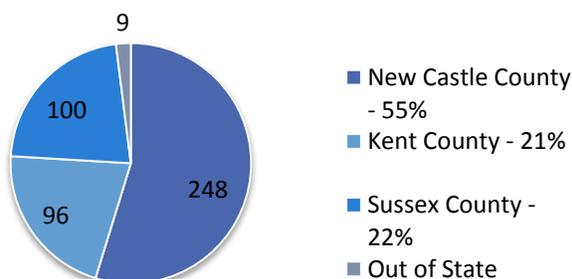
Of the 556 veterans in Delaware that experienced homelessness from January 2015 – January 2017, 85% were male and 15% were female.

3. Homeless Veterans by Household Type



77% of veterans that experienced homelessness from January 2015 – January 2017 were single adults, while 15% were members of a family with children. Just over 6% were adult couples without children.

4. Number of Veterans Housed by County



All 3 counties in Delaware continue to work diligently to identify and permanently house homeless veterans as quickly as possible. 55% of the 453 homeless veterans that moved into permanent housing were housed by New Castle County, 21% by Kent County, and 22% by Sussex County. A few veterans left Delaware for permanent housing opportunities elsewhere.

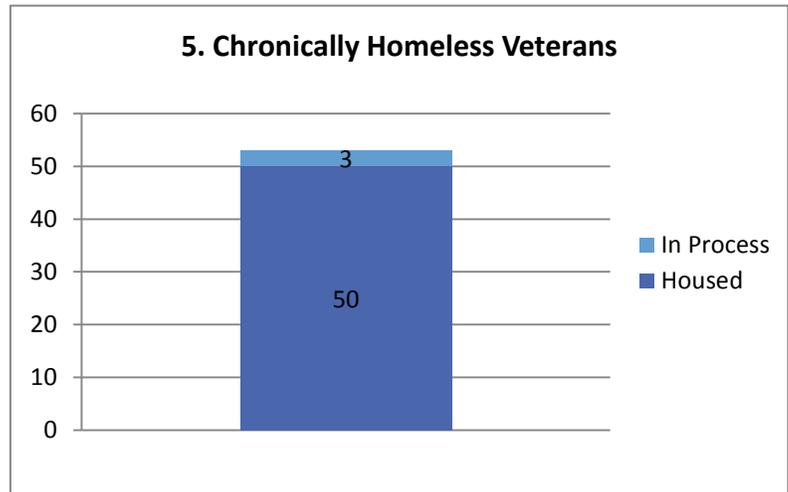
April 2017

In January 2016, 37 homeless veterans were experiencing chronic homelessness in Delaware.

Since January 2016, 53 chronically homeless veterans have been identified.

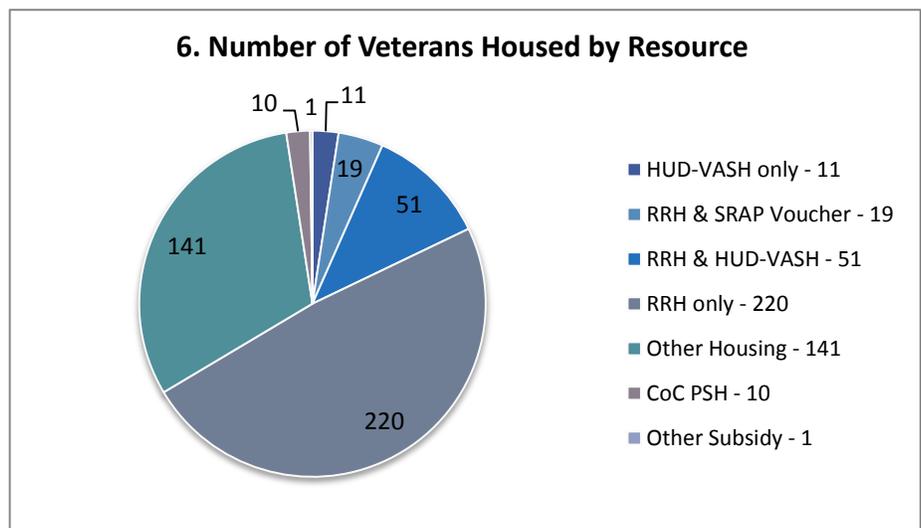
To date, all except 3 have been permanently housed.

The 3 remaining chronically homeless veterans have been connected to a permanent housing resource for which they are eligible, and are in the process of being permanently housed.



A variety of permanent housing resources and interventions were utilized during this time to assist homeless veterans. The chart below shows the number of veterans permanently housed with each housing intervention or housing subsidy.

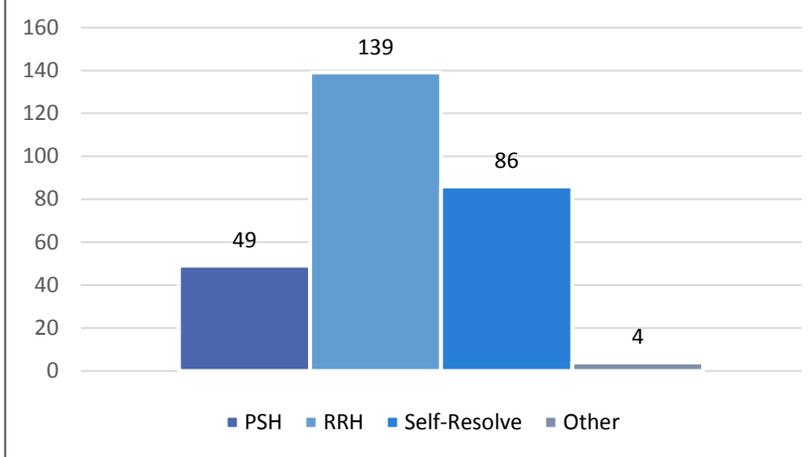
220 homeless veterans (48%) were housed by rapid re-housing (RRH) through the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program. These veterans benefited from short-term rental assistance and case management to be able to get quickly back on their feet.



10 homeless veterans (2%) were permanently housed with Continuum of Care permanent supportive housing (CoC PSH) resources and 51 homeless veterans, or 11%, received move-in assistance from SSVF RRH and a permanent housing subsidy through the HUD-VASH program. 11 more were housed with HUD-VASH only, without any additional SSVF move-in assistance. Lastly, 19 veterans were housed with an SRAP (State Rental Assistance Program) voucher. All 80 (17.6%) of these veterans needed a permanent housing subsidy and access to ongoing in-home support services in order to remain stably housed.

141 homeless veterans (31%) accessed permanent housing without a formal housing intervention provided by the homeless assistance system. They may have moved in with family or friends permanently, found a rental unit they could afford, gained employment and moved into their own place, identified a roommate to share living costs with, or made other living arrangements. In other words, almost 1/3 of all homeless veterans were able to “self-resolve” their homelessness. We can use this information to estimate the types of resources we will need in the future to maintain an effective end to veteran homelessness.

7. Housing Resources Needed Annually



We can estimate that approximately 278 veterans will experience homelessness in Delaware annually. Half – or 139 – will need short term case management and financial supports (rapid re-housing) to move from homelessness to permanent housing.

Many – approximately 30%– will self-resolve their homelessness.

49 (18%) will need some type of permanent supportive housing that includes access to intensive services.