

BVS POC REPORT

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

1. **Date of Report:** September 2023
2. **BVS POC(s):** Senator Mamie Locke, Joe Campa
3. **Service Area/Program:** Housing and Homelessness
4. **VDVS Director/Program Manager:** Housing and Criminal Justice Director-Donna Harrison; Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator-Desiree Taylor
5. **Mission of service area/program:**

The Virginia Veteran and Family Support Program (VVFS) is operated by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services and provides OUTREACH, CONNECTION and SUPPORT to veterans and their families as they address the challenges of military service, transition, deployments, Post Traumatic Stress, and other behavioral health concerns, as well as Traumatic Brain Injuries and other physical injuries.

SERVICES THEY PROVIDE: VVFS provides peer and family support, care coordination, and resource linkages to Service members, veterans, and their families (SMVF). Referrals are coordinated with Community Services Boards, community nonprofits, brain injury service providers, VA medical facilities and other public and private agencies. VVFS also provides outreach and support to justice-involved service members and veterans interfacing with courts, diversion/veteran treatment docket programs, during incarceration in jails and prisons, and while on probation and/or parole supervision.

In addition, the program also provides specialized outreach and support to homeless services and housing grantees and community providers.

6. Who does the service area/program serve?

Veterans of any era (regardless of discharge status) who are Virginia residents; members of the Virginia National Guard and Armed Forces Reserves; and family members and caregivers of those veterans and service members. They work hard to provide a "no wrong door approach", meaning if they can't provide that service within the program, they'll do their best to connect them to a resource/provider that can.

7. What are the service line's primary objectives?

Provide care coordination, peer and family support services to Service Members, Veterans, and their families (SMVF).

Facilitate access to behavioral health, rehabilitative, and supportive services at the Federal, State, and local levels for SMVF.

8. What are the key results that support the objectives?

In FY23 (thru May 2023), VVFS served an average of 322 total clients (new and existing clients) each week. Of these clients, 1,123 were new clients. This included connecting veterans and their family members for resources to approximately 2,523 service needs. These include housing needs (41%), behavioral health support (11%), benefits assistance (10%), employment (7%), and homeless assistance (9%).

9. What specific objectives has the service line established and what progress has the service line/program made toward achieving the objectives.

FY23 Data Overview (thru May 2023):

- 90% of all new VVFS clients will have a needs assessment completed in 7 days of initial client contact for the purpose of creating a coordinated resource plan **(95% out of 1,302)**
- 90% of veterans with a identified behavioral health need will be connected to an appropriate resource **(100% out of 218)**
- 90% of veterans experiencing literal homelessness will be connected to a shelter/housing resource **(98% out of 195)**
- VVFS and Benefits will screen 95% of new SMVF for suicide risk **(94% out of 17,733)**

10. What are some operational highlights from the past year?

Housing/homeless sub fund: The homeless sub fund is provided by Veterans Service Foundation (VSF) funds. The fund assists Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH), and other community providers with rental assistance and homeless prevention funds for veterans and families. In FY23, the program partnered with nine housing providers in conjunction with other community providers and four VA Medical Centers to provide \$239, 256 in funding for 226 veterans needing gap rental assistance and eviction prevention. The highest needs were for rental arrears, security deposits, and first month's rent. The VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator manages the homeless sub fund with the assistance of the VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Director.

Corporation for Supportive Housing -Housing and Justice Workgroup:

In addition, the VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Director and VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator joined the Justice and Housing workgroup which is a group based on a grant received by the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH). The Justice and Housing workgroup is a national project with a geographic focus area to explore the need and address challenges for justice-involved individuals to secure housing. In FY23, the group created a Learning Collaborative for property managers and landlords to examine tenant selection plans and help increase housing access for justice-involved individuals.

- Virginia held the **2023 Point-in-Time Count** on the night of January 2023. Based on the PIT count (**please note this is preliminary data until HUD provides the final data in late Fall**) the veterans experiencing homelessness was 386 (284 sheltered, 102 unsheltered). The unsheltered number of veterans increased from 47 (in 2022) to 102 (2023). The PIT count in January 2022 accounted for 395 total homeless veterans. The 2023 count is 2.3% lower than the 2022 count, but there is a substantial increase in unsheltered veterans this year. This is likely due to rising housing costs and increasing inflation rates.
- **Additional 2023 Virginia PIT count preliminary demographic data-**
 - Gender:*
 - 46 female veterans (32 sheltered, 14 unsheltered)
 - 334 male veterans (247 sheltered, 87 unsheltered)
 - 6 Transgender veterans (5 sheltered, 1 unsheltered)
 - Race:*
 - 6 American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous
 - 1 Asian, Asian American
 - 199 Black, African American, or African
 - 1 Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - 156 White
 - 23 Multiple races
 - Chronically homeless* (as defined by HUD- “an individual with a disability who has been continuously homeless for one year or more or has experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years where the combined length of time homeless on those occasions is at least 12 months”):
 - 90 chronically homeless veterans (63 sheltered, 27 unsheltered)

Note: As HUD noted in the 2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment report, there continues to be an overrepresentation of people who identify as Black, African American, or African, as well as Indigenous people (including Native Americans and Pacific Islanders) among the population experiencing homelessness compared to the U.S. Population. In Virginia, Black, African American, or African veterans represented 52% of the homeless veteran population in the January 2023 PIT count (preliminary data), but only makeup 21% of Black veterans of the veteran population overall.

VVFS continues to support housing and homelessness initiatives statewide as well as provide support for direct services to veterans in need.

11. What type of outreach did the service line conduct and what are the results?

VVFS continues to outreach and collaborate with Homeless Continua of Care, the Veterans Affairs Medical Center Homeless Programs, Supportive Services for Veterans Families providers, and other housing/homelessness providers to serve veterans experiencing homelessness or unstably housed. VVFS also represents the agency on several statewide housing workgroups.

In FY23, the VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator and Housing and Criminal Justice Director met with a local housing provider in the Richmond area to discuss a possible housing pilot project for veterans being released from incarceration.

In FY23, the VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator provided housing information sessions for justice-involved veterans.

The VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator is conducting outreach to the Continuum of Care (CoC) Leads to assess housing needs, obtain housing updates, and coordinate information and services related to housing needs for veterans.

12. What, if any, new initiatives / innovative solutions were launched during the past year?

The homeless sub fund assistance timeline was lowered from 3 years to 2 years to address the growing need for rental assistance and eviction prevention funds. This shorter time period will allow VVFS to assist providers with more assistance for veterans that need funds to help them maintain their housing.

13. What are the biggest challenges facing the service area / program at present?

Affordable housing continues to be a challenge as well as the impact on inflation to our clients. Since COVID funding has ended, there have been increases in evictions which is putting a strain on staff and clients. **Statewide rents have increased on average about 24% throughout Virginia and production issues have slowed the development of affordable housing. More than 60% of Virginia's renters have experienced an increase in rent this fiscal year.** Stable housing is a key protective factor for behavioral health and in-turn suicide prevention.

[WHRO - Rent in almost all of Virginia increased in a decade's time](#)

[Rent control remains prohibited in Virginia despite rising rents | 13newsnow.com](#)

[‘Slow yet competitive’: In Virginia, housing prices remain high and supply tight - Virginia Mercury](#)

14. How does delivering the service/program help Virginia’s veterans?

VVFS helps Service Members, Veterans, and their families access care and support for behavioral health, rehabilitative, and supportive services needs. Often this can prevent a crisis and/or suicide. VVFS staff strive to help SMVF link to services and benefits in federal, state and local systems. In addition, leadership team members serve on statewide advisory committees (on justice, housing, peer support, behavioral health and suicide prevention services) and form strategic partnerships that enhance systems of care for SMVF.

15. By helping the veteran, how does it help the Commonwealth?

By helping the veteran, it helps the Commonwealth by continuing to ensure Virginia is the most military and veteran friendly state and provides comprehensive and wrap-around services for those residing in Virginia. Ready access to care and supportive services helps veterans and families Stay, Work, and Thrive in Virginia.

16. What strategic opportunities are there for the future?

The view of housing as healthcare is a continued focus nationally. There are healthcare organizations finding creative ways to address the full wellbeing of individuals by incorporating staff (e.g. patient/community navigators) to help connect their members to housing and other supportive services. Virginia agencies should leverage opportunities to partner with and provide support for healthcare agencies that are focusing on access to healthcare and housing services.

VVFS will continue to collaborate with veteran specific and non-veteran housing and homelessness programs. Housing is the largest need for clients that access VVFS support. This is an important area and as the administration builds out its housing priorities, VVFS is ready to assist.

17. What else do you want the Board to know about this service area?

- There continues to be a shortage of affordable housing and an eviction crisis (due to the ending of the eviction moratorium) that is affecting housing sustainability.
- Rental increases are placing additional burdens on veterans and families to acquire and maintain housing.
- Some programs that provided supportive services are no longer operating or have not received continued funding (depletion of CARES Act funding).

VVFS assists a range of veterans and their family members with complex needs including criminal justice involvement, caregiver support, homelessness and other housing issues, and

behavioral health needs. VVFS staff are a crucial touchpoint and provide support to navigate through complex systems of care. Housing is a critical component of well-being, is a protective factor for suicide risk, and is essential for veterans and their families to Stay, Work, and Thrive in Virginia.