# Ending Veteran Homelessness: Policies and Procedures for a Comprehensive System Response

**Approved July 2016**

## Ohio Balance of State Continuum of Care

## Introduction and Background

In 2010, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) introduced the first comprehensive federal strategy to prevent and end homelessness. This plan, called *Opening Doors*, outlined a number of goals related to ending homelessness in the U.S. – the first of these committed to ending Veteran homelessness by 2016.[1]

In 2015, the USICH, along with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), adopted a vision of what it means to end homelessness and shared specific criteria and benchmarks for ending Veteran homelessness in order to help guide communities as they take action to achieve the goal, with a focus on long-term, lasting solutions.[2]

In line with the federal goals outlined in *Opening Doors*, the Ohio Balance of State Continuum of Care (BoSCoC) has committed to a goal of ending Veteran homelessness in the CoC by 2017. To that end, the Ohio BoSCoC has focused recent efforts on expanding availability of critical housing resources for homeless Veterans and improving our coordinated system response.

The Ohio BoSCoC has determined that ending Veteran homelessness in our CoC means the following:

*Where Veteran homelessness does occur, it is rare, brief, and non-recurring. More specifically, every identified homeless Veteran who is unsheltered, in emergency shelter, or in Transitional Housing (TH) in the Ohio BoSCoC is provided permanent housing, if they want it, within an average of 30 days. To achieve this, the Ohio BoSCoC is committed to the principles of Housing First, which means our system is primarily focused on quick placement into permanent housing, respecting Veteran choice, and targeting our resources to those with greatest needs.*

Using the federal criteria and benchmarks as our map, this document, which outlines Ohio BoSCoC policies and procedures for a coordinated and standardized response to Veteran homelessness, is a significant step towards our goal of ending Veteran homelessness.

## Target Audience

All homeless assistance projects in the Ohio BoSCoC, regardless of funding source, must abide by the policies and procedures outlined here.

## Responsibility for Compliance with P&P and Managing Homeless Veterans Report

The Ohio BoSCoC Homeless Veterans Workgroup, with support from CoC staff, is charged with managing the Ohio BoSCoC Homeless Veterans Report (described below), ensuring that the policies and procedures outlined in this document are implemented appropriately at the local community level, and regularly monitoring progress towards the ending Veteran homelessness goal.

Ohio BoSCoC Homeless Veterans Workgroup membership includes:
- All Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) grantees serving Ohio BoSCoC counties
- All VA-funded Community Contract Emergency Housing providers (HCHV) serving Ohio BoSCoC counties
- All VA-funded Grant and Per Diem (GPD) grantees serving Ohio BoSCoC counties
- Representatives from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA)
    - Ohio VA Medical Center representatives (all VAMC's serving Ohio BoSCoC)
    - VISN 10 representative
- Other Ohio BoSCoC shelter, Transitional Housing (TH), Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) providers who regularly serve homeless Veterans in their programs
- Other Ohio BoSCoC providers and stakeholders who volunteer to participate

---

[1] Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness - https://www.usich.gov/opening-doors
[2] Achieving the Goal of Ending Veteran Homelessness: Criteria and Benchmarks - https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/criteria-for-ending-veteran-homelessness/

*Ohio BoSCoC Policies and Procedures for Veteran Homelessness Response, FINAL 7.2016*

The Homeless Veterans Workgroup meets on a monthly basis via webinar and conference call. Anyone interested in participating in this workgroup may contact CoC staff (ericamulryan@cohhio.org) with their request.

## Definition of Veteran

A Veteran is someone who, regardless of discharge status, has served on active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States. This does not include inactive military reserves or the National Guard unless the person was called up to active duty.

## Ohio BoSCoC Homeless Veterans Report

The Ohio BoSCoC Homeless Veterans Report (hereafter called the Homeless Vets Report) is the report used to identify all currently homeless Veterans (in shelters, transitional housing, or unsheltered) in the CoC's area and to report on current housing plans and movement towards permanent housing. The Ohio BoSCoC HMIS is the primary data source for the Homeless Vets Report and includes a variety of pieces of data. However, no personally identifying information appears on the report; instead, each homeless Veteran is identified by their HMIS client ID or a unique client identifier. The data in the Homeless Vets Report is further used to regularly report on the CoC's progress in ending Veteran homelessness.

To facilitate the reporting on homeless Veterans housing plans and movement towards permanent housing, the Homeless Vets Report is housed in Google Sheets so that all providers responsible for working with identified Veterans on their housing plans can easily make updates.

## Identifying Homeless Veterans

1. **Policy** – All literally homeless Veterans in the Ohio BoSCoC geography are identified
   a. **Procedure** – SSVF grantees engage in street outreach in the communities within their service areas on a weekly basis, as appropriate, for purposes of identifying all unsheltered homeless Veterans
      i. In communities where there are dedicated street outreach teams, SSVF staff coordinate with the local street outreach teams to ensure comprehensive coverage and efficient provision of services
         1. SSVF and street outreach must put into place an agreement wherein the street outreach team immediately refers all homeless Veterans to SSVF for housing assistance
            a. All identified unsheltered homeless Veterans are either entered into HMIS once they become SSVF clients, or are added to the Homeless Vets Report by the SSVF provider using a unique identifier, if they are not yet a client
   b. **Procedure** – SSVF grantees identify all homeless Veterans residing in local non-HMIS participating ES and TH projects, including victim services provider agencies
      i. SSVF grantees engage in weekly in-reach to non-HMIS participating ES and TH projects in their service area for purposes of identifying homeless Veterans
         1. SSVF grantees may develop formal referral relationships and protocol with local non-HMIS participating ES and TH providers. But if local ES/TH providers cannot maintain regular referrals, weekly in-reach to those projects should happen.
            a. All identified sheltered homeless Veterans are either entered into HMIS once they become SSVF clients, or are added to the Homeless Vets Report by the SSVF provider using a unique identifier, if they are not yet a client
   c. **Procedure** – CoC staff will run the Ohio BoSCoC Homeless Veterans Report on a bi-weekly basis and share the report, with newly homeless Veterans clearly identified, with SSVF grantees for purposes of identifying any newly homeless Veterans
      i. SSVF grantees conduct outreach to the newly homeless Veterans appearing on the Homeless Vets Report as appropriate
   d. **Procedure** – VA staff identifying and/or assisting literally homeless Veterans may ensure those Veterans get added to the Homeless Vets Report in one of the following ways:

           i.   VA staff refer the homeless Veteran to the local SSVF provider who, in turn, enters the client data into HMIS (that client-level data is then pulled into the Homeless Vets Report), in cases where the Veteran becomes an SSVF client

           ii.   VA staff with Ohio BoSCoC HMIS licenses may check HMIS to see if the homeless Veteran is already in HMIS

                1.   If so, the Veteran is already on the Homeless Vets Report

                2.   If not, VA staff may follow steps outlined above to make a referral to the local SSVF provider.

                3.   If the Veteran declines SSVF assistance or cannot be located, VA staff add the Veteran to the Homeless Vets Report using a unique identifier

2. **Policy** – All literally homeless Veterans identified in the Ohio BoSCoC are reported on the Ohio BoSCoC Homeless Veterans Report

    a.  **Procedure** – Ohio BoSCoC staff maintain and populate the Ohio BoSCoC Homeless Vets Report

           i.   Ohio BoSCoC staff run the Homeless Vets Report out of HMIS on a bi-weekly basis, update the Homeless Vets Report in Google Sheets accordingly, and inform all identified Ohio BoSCoC Responsible Providers when it's available

                1.   The report includes data on all literally homeless Veterans in the CoC (Vets in ES, TH, and unsheltered)

                2.   HMIS serves as the primary data source for the Homeless Vets Report, although Homeless Vets Workgroup members may add by hand identified Veterans who may not be residing in an HMIS participating shelter or who may be unsheltered

                    a.   VA staff with Ohio BoSCoC HMIS licenses will work with local SSVF providers to add literally homeless Veterans they have identified to the Homeless Vets Report if not already populated on the report, per procedure 1d, above.

           ii.   CoC staff identify on the Homeless Vets Report an *Ohio BoSCoC Provider Responsible* for assisting the homeless Veteran to move into permanent housing and reporting on required Data Fields on the Homeless Vets Report

                1.   In most cases, the identified responsible provider is the SSVF grantee serving the county in which the Veteran is identified.

                2.   In cases where the homeless Veteran is residing in an ES or TH project and not dually enrolled in SSVF (or declined SSVF assistance), the provider primarily assisting the homeless Veteran must report out all required data for the Veteran on a bi-weekly basis

    b.  **Procedure** – Ohio BoSCoC Responsible Providers assigned to a homeless Veteran on the Homeless Vets Report provide updates on housing plans, offers of permanent housing, etc. on a bi-weekly basis

           i.   Updates are made to the Homeless Vets Report housed on Google Sheets

    c.  **Procedure** – The Homeless Vets Workgroup reviews the Homeless Vets Report on a monthly basis

           i.   If CoC staff and/or the Homeless Vets Workgroup observe decreases in the performance of the Ohio BoSCoC system response to Veteran homelessness, such as increasing lengths of time to house, the workgroup may decide to increase the frequency of the provision of updates to the Homeless Vets Report

# Providing Immediate Shelter to Unsheltered Homeless Veterans

3. **Policy** – The Ohio BoSCoC provides shelter immediately to any Veteran experiencing unsheltered homelessness who wants it

    a.  **Procedure** – All state and federally funded Ohio BoSCoC ES projects must comply with the Ohio BoSCoC Homeless Program Standards, which require system-wide housing first orientation, by January 2017

    b.  **Procedure** – SSVF grantees and, where applicable, local dedicated street outreach teams assist in moving unsheltered homeless Veterans into local emergency shelters

i. If local shelters are full, SSVF providers may pay for a temporary stay in a local hotel/motel for the unsheltered homeless Veteran, where the Veteran is eligible and following SSVF requirements,

ii. If unsheltered Veterans decline the shelter offer because of excessive barriers to entry (ie, barriers that do not comply with the Ohio BoSCoC Homeless Program Standards), SSVF or other program staff working with the Veteran will contact CoC staff to report the issue and CoC and SSVF/other staff will advocate on behalf of the unsheltered homeless Veteran

1. If the issues with local shelter barriers to entry cannot be immediately resolved, SSVF grantees may pay for a temporary stay in a local hotel/motel for the unsheltered homeless Veteran, where the Veteran is eligible and following SSVF requirements

c. **Procedure** – If an unsheltered homeless Veteran declines a shelter offer for reasons other than excessive barriers to entry, SSVF grantees and, where applicable, local dedicated street outreach teams will make offers of shelter to the unsheltered homeless Veteran on a bi-weekly basis, at minimum.

i. In extreme weather situations, shelter offers must be made on an every three-day basis, at minimum.

4. **Policy** – Ohio BoSCoC homeless services providers assisting unsheltered homeless Veterans will document offers of shelter

a. **Procedure** - SSVF grantees and, where applicable, local dedicated street outreach teams or other providers assisting unsheltered homeless Veterans, document the offers of shelter they make to veterans

i. Documentation is made on the Homeless Vets Report and includes identifying the date of the shelter offer, whether the veteran accepted or declined, and reasons for a decline

## Housing Focused Systems and Providers

5. **Policy** – The Ohio BoSCoC is committed to immediately providing permanent housing (PH) to all homeless Veterans who desire it, regardless of perceived needs or issues

a. **Procedure** – Ohio BoSCoC emergency shelter providers immediately, meaning within 2 business days, refer any presenting homeless Veteran to their local SSVF provider for assistance obtaining permanent housing

i. Referral to SSVF does not necessarily mean that a Veteran will be assisted with SSVF resources. SSVF grantees must determine if the Veteran is eligible and if the Veteran desires to accept an offer of assistance.

1. SSVF providers will only decline to provide RRH assistance to homeless Veterans if they are not eligible per SSVF program requirements or if the Veterans decline SSVF-RRH assistance

2. For those Veterans who have higher housing barriers and may require, and choose Permanent Supportive Housing, providers (SSVF or the current shelter provider) will coordinate with PSH providers as soon as possible and potentially provide bridge housing in the short term

6. **Policy** – The Ohio BoSCoC prioritizes the use of Transitional Housing (TH), including VA Grant and Per Diem (GPD), as a short-term bridge to PH

a. **Procedure** – Homeless Veterans residing in emergency shelters are immediately offered assistance to move into permanent housing (PH)

ii. In accordance with Policy 4 above, all homeless Veterans are immediately, within two business days, referred to SSVF for eligibility determination, assessment, review of available housing options, and possible Rapid Re-housing (RRH) assistance

b. **Procedure** - Homeless Veterans are only assisted with TH in the following situations:

iii. The Veteran has explicitly declined an offer of RRH assistance because of a self-identified need for intensive services that the Veteran believes can be provided by a particular TH project

1. If a homeless Veteran requests to move into a TH bed provided by an Ohio BoSCoC GPD provider, and has declined SSVF RRH assistance, the emergency shelter provider may contact GPD providers directly for possible

referral. Detailed GPD provider information can be found in the appendix of this document

    iv. The Veteran accepted an offer of PH, either Permanent Supportive Housing or RRH, but the PH unit is not immediately available.
        1. In this situation, a Veteran may be moved into a TH unit while waiting for the PH unit to become available, rather than remaining in the emergency shelter or in an unsheltered location
            a. Once a PH offer has been made, accepted, and documented in the Homeless Vets Report by the appropriate Ohio BosCoC Provider Responsible, additional offers of PH do not need to made or documented

  c. **Procedure** – Where a homeless Veteran has chosen to move into a TH project because of the desire for intensive services, as described in procedure 2b above, the TH provider must make new offers of assisted PH to the Veteran on a bi-weekly basis. The dates of the PH offer and the Veterans' acceptance or decline of that offer must be reported in the Homeless Vets Report
    v. The Ohio BoSCoC TH provider responsible for assisting the homeless Veteran will report on the status of the housing plan in the Homeless Vets Report

7. **Policy** –Ohio BoSCoC providers provide support, information, and targeted assistance to previously assisted Veterans to help minimize returns to homelessness
  a. **Procedure** – Ohio BoSCoC housing providers, including SSVF and other RRH grantees, will provide information, including contact information, to assisted homeless Veterans to ensure they know whom to contact if they become at risk of homelessness after housing assistance ends
  b. **Procedure** – Ohio BoSCoC providers make follow-up contact with all clients at least once after the client's exit from the program and into housing
    i. Follow-up contact occurs between one and six months after the termination of financial assistance
    ii. If initial attempts at contact are unsuccessful, Ohio BoSCoC providers make multiple attempts at contact, using multiple methods (e.g., phone, email, letter, in-person visits)
  c. **Procedure** – Ohio BoSCoC providers will prioritize for assistance those homeless Veterans who have been assisted in the past and are eligible for assistance again.

# Coordination between the CoC and the VA at the System and Project Level

8. **Policy** – VA-funded SSVF and VASH projects and providers coordinate with non VA-funded RRH and PSH providers to ensure homeless Veterans enter permanent housing swiftly and in a way that most efficiently uses community resources
  a. **Procedure** - When literally homeless Veterans are identified by an Ohio BoSCoC homeless assistance provider, the provider immediately, within two business days, refers to the local SSVF provider
    i. Local HCRP-RRH providers, in particular, only provide assistance to homeless Veterans when they are not eligible for VA-funded programs, such as SSVF
  b. **Procedure** - In line with the *Ohio BoSCoC Homeless Program Standards*, Ohio BoSCoC RRH and PSH providers will prioritize for their services eligible, literally homeless Veterans who are not eligible for VA-funded assistance, such as that provided by SSVF or VASH

9. **Policy** –SSVF, GPD, and other homeless assistance providers regularly identifying and assisting homeless Veterans engage in regular community meetings with local VA and VSO staff for purposes of identifying and providing assistance to local homeless Veterans

## Monitoring System and Provider Capacity to End Veteran Homelessness

10. **Policy** – The Ohio BoSCoC monitors provider and system capacity to ensure the CoC maintains resources to move homeless Veterans into PH quickly
    a. **Procedure** - On a quarterly basis at minimum, CoC staff will survey SSVF grantees to ensure ongoing ability and capacity to serve all eligible, literally homeless veterans
    b. **Procedure** - On a monthly basis at minimum, CoC staff will review and share data about the CoC's progress on the federal benchmarks demonstrating ending Veteran homelessness

11. **Policy** – The Ohio BoSCoC monitors progress on the federal benchmarks for ending Veteran homelessness to ensure the sustainability of the CoC's system response and identify any problems or issue areas
    a. **Procedur**e – On a monthly basis at minimum, CoC staff will monitor and report on the following data:
        i. Federal Benchmarks (per the federal specifications)
            1. Number of Actively Homeless Veterans (not having declined PH)
            2. Number of Chronically Homeless Veterans
            3. Average length of time to house Veterans
            4. Number of Veterans exiting to PH vs. number of Veterans entering homelessness
            5. Number of Veterans entering TH (having declined PH offers) vs. number of Veterans entering homelessness
        ii. VASH utilization rates
        iii. VASH time to house homeless Veterans (average days)
        iv. Number of homeless Veterans entering our system (per month)
        v. Number of homeless Veterans exiting to PH (per month)
        vi. PSH and VASH turnover rates
        vii. Returns to homelessness across all project types
        viii. Number/rate of homeless Veterans served by non-VA funded programs (including HCRP)

## Implementation of and Compliance with Policies and Procedures

Upon adoption by the Ohio BoSCoC Board, CoC staff will distribute these policies and procedures to the full CoC membership (via email listserv and posting on COHHIO's website) and host a webinar to introduce and explain them. CoC staff will also work with regional representatives to the CoC Board, SSVF providers, and others as appropriate to develop plans for facilitating ongoing local conversations and provision of technical assistance to CoC providers related to implementation of and compliance with these policies and procedures.

Ohio BoSCoC homeless assistance providers must comply with these policies and procedures within 60 days of their release. The only exception is for the policies and procedures that reflect the requirements included in the Ohio BoSCoC Homeless Program Standards, such as implementation of Housing First practices. Compliance with the Homeless Program Standards is required by January 2017 at the latest.

Initially, monitoring for provider compliance with these policies and procedures will be done primarily via check-ins and reporting in the monthly Homeless Veterans Workgroup meetings, and through informal surveys of providers across the Ohio BoSCoC. Over time, monitoring for compliance with these policies and procedures will be incorporated into a standard tool and process. Lastly, lack of compliance at the community or provider level may be identified in the data monitoring/analysis processes outlined in the *Monitoring Provider and System Capacity* section above.

# Common Terminology and Definitions

- Continuum of Care (CoC)
  - CoC refers to both the planning body that coordinates the provision of housing and services for homeless families and individuals in a defined geographic area, as well as the geographic area itself.
    - The Ohio Balance of State Continuum of Care is comprised of the 80 rural and suburban counties in the State of Ohio. These policies and procedures apply to programs, providers, and stakeholders in those 80 counties only.
- Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS)
  - The CoC's data system that houses client-level data on all persons assisted by HMIS participating homeless assistance providers in the CoC
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
  - In addition to providing for numerous affordable housing programs and resources, HUD administers the primary federal resources for homeless assistance projects, including:
    - CoC Program
      - Provides funding to CoCs to support a wide variety of homeless assistance projects
    - Emergency Solutions Grant Program (ESG)
      - Provides funding to communities to assist in the operation of emergency shelters and the provision of rapid re-housing assistance

- U.S Department of Veteran Affairs (VA)
  - The VA provides for a wide range of programs and services for people who have served in the military as well as their families
    - The VA funds several projects that are targeted specifically to homeless Veterans and their families including:
      - Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF)
        - VA-funded project that provides homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing assistance to homeless Veterans and their families
      - Healthcare for Homeless Veterans Emergency Housing (HCHV/EH)
        - VA funded emergency shelter beds for homeless Veterans
      - VA Grant and Per Diem program (GPD)
        - Community-based transitional housing for homeless Veterans
      - HUD-VA Supportive Housing (VASH)
        - Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) for homeless Veterans and their families
- Emergency Shelter
  - Any facility for which the primary purpose is to provide a temporary shelter for the homeless in general or for specific populations of the homeless and which does not require occupants to sign leases or occupancy agreements. Homeless status is an eligibility requirement and homelessness is documented.
- Rapid Re-Housing
  - A homeless assistance project type that quickly moves households out of homelessness and into permanent housing through the provision of case management services and limited financial assistance as needed. Homeless status is an eligibility requirement and homelessness is documented.
- Transitional Housing
  - A homeless assistance project type that provides households with up to 24 months of housing and services assistance. Homeless status is an eligibility requirement and homelessness is documented.
- Permanent Supportive Housing
  - Permanent supportive housing is permanent housing with indefinite leasing or rental assistance paired with supportive services to assist homeless persons with a disability or families with an adult or child member with a disability achieve housing stability. Homeless status is an eligibility requirement and homelessness is documented.