

## Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness in 2015 City of Colorado Springs

*Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness* set a bold goal to end Veteran homelessness in the United States by end of 2015. This year, as part of the Joining Forces Initiative, the Whitehouse announced the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness – a call to action to mayors across the country to make a commitment to ending veteran homelessness in their cities in 2015. Colorado Springs Mayor Steve Bach has joined this effort on behalf of the many people working to end homelessness in our community.

Colorado Springs can end veteran homelessness in 2015. In the past two years, through the combined effort of many local partners, the community has seen a significant decline in the number of homeless veterans. Of the 230 homeless veterans counted at the point in time count in 2012, 108 identified as unsheltered. In 2014, that number was reduced to 145 homeless veterans and 46 identified as unsheltered. By joining forces with the Continuum of Care and Veteran service providers, Colorado Springs can achieve the following goals by the end of 2015:

- House 100 veterans.
- Reduce to 30 the number of unsheltered veteran's counted in the Point in Time Count in 2016.
- Build capacity to rapidly house every homeless veteran who wants housing.

### Key Resources

- **VA Homeless Veteran Programs.** The local VA Healthcare for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) program provides extensive resources and expertise in preventing and ending Veteran homelessness. One of the most effective resources is the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program. This permanent supportive housing program combines Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) rental assistance for homeless Veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the VA. HUD-VASH program manages 170 vouchers and targets *chronically* homeless veterans and veterans with the most chronic vulnerabilities.
- **Rocky Mountain Human Services (RMHS)/Homes for All Veterans (HAV) program.** As a grantee of the VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program, RMHS provides staff and resources to prevent and end *acute* Veteran homelessness. RMHS staff employs a Housing First/Rapid Rehousing approach to place homeless Veterans into permanent housing as quickly as is possible, providing case management services to enhance Veteran housing stability. Staff members also provide homelessness prevention for Veteran households at risk for homelessness. Close collaboration between VA HUD-VASH staff and HAV staff ensures Veterans experiencing a housing crisis are connected with supportive services that best meet their needs.
- **City of Colorado Springs.** The City is a HUD entitlement community and receives approximately \$3.8 million in federal block grant funds annually. The City directs a portion of these funds and a share of General Funds to shelter facilities and operations, support services, outreach, tenant based rental assistance and housing rehabilitation. In January 2014 the City released *The Initiative to End Homelessness in Colorado Springs*, a two-year plan designed to bring a fresh focus to the problem of homelessness in Colorado Springs and to clarify and strengthen the City's role in combatting homelessness.

- **Colorado Springs Housing Authority (CSHA).** CSHA is the largest provider of public housing in Colorado Springs. CSHA manages 14 Shelter+Care vouchers for Veterans and administers a tenant based rental assistance program funded by the City of Colorado Springs.
- **Colorado Springs/El Paso County Continuum of Care (CoC) & Pikes Peak United Way (PPUW).** This program, administered by the Pikes Peak United Way, supports coordination and collaboration among homeless service providers, local authorities and community members to house and support persons experiencing and at risk of homelessness. The CoC/PPUW is developing a Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement (CAHP) system. As part of this coordinated entry system, the Vulnerability Index and Service Prioritization Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) survey is being administered at the Homeless Veteran Stand Down and completed surveys will be entered into a database designed to assess and match those in need with appropriate resources.

**In addition to these key resources, ending veteran homelessness will call upon other community organizations serving veterans.**

- **Local Veteran Service Organizations.** Local membership of national veteran service organizations such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion and other Veteran organizations.
- **Colorado Veteran Resource Coalition (CVRC)/“Crawford House”.** CVRC provides transitional housing and residential care and treatment for veterans who are homeless and/or suffer from substance abuse.
- **El Paso County Homeless Veteran Coalition/ Homeless Veteran Stand Down.** This small non-profit organizes the annual Homeless Veteran Stand Down event to connect homeless Veterans with a variety of resources. The 2013 Stand Down served 197 Veteran participants.

### **Strategy**

- Deploy a coordinated assessment tool for participating agencies serving Veterans. Pilot at the Homeless Veteran Stand Down. HUD intends for coordinated assessment systems to establish system-wide entry, assessment, and referral processes.
- Partner with Rocky Mountain Human Services to expand outreach to Veterans experiencing homelessness, and focus outreach efforts on achieving housing outcomes. RMHS will refer veterans to VA, CSHA or provide direct assistance using the SSVF grant resources.
- Target CSHA housing vouchers and tenant based rental assistance to veterans experiencing homelessness. Clients will be referred to CSHA by RMHS. RMHS will provide case management services to better ensure long-term housing stability.
- Seek participation from private, public and nonprofit housing providers and landlords. Develop a job description for a Community Housing Coordinator and work with the State to identify funding sources for the position. Prioritize housing rehabilitation funding to providers who open units for Veterans.
- Increase the number of shelter beds to better ensure Veterans identified through outreach can be sheltered immediately. Advocate for shelter policies that make it easier for veterans to access shelter.
- Celebrate success.

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