



Veterans and Homelessness

The federal government assists veterans experiencing homelessness through a number of targeted federal programs. This In Focus describes the major federal programs that assist homeless veterans, funding for select programs, and the number and characteristics of veterans experiencing homelessness.

Federal Programs for Homeless Veterans

Programs to assist homeless veterans are funded through three agencies: the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Department of Labor (DOL), and Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

VA Programs

- **Healthcare for Homeless Veterans (HCHV):** Through HCHV, VA medical center staff conduct outreach to homeless veterans; provide care and treatment for medical, psychiatric, and substance use disorders; and refer veterans for supportive services. The HCHV program is authorized through FY2022 (P.L. 116-159).
- **Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans (DCHV):** DCHV (first funded through P.L. 100-71) provides rehabilitative services for physically and mentally ill or aged veterans who need assistance, but are not in need of the level of care offered by hospitals and nursing homes. Through DCHV, veterans receive medical, psychiatric, and substance use treatment, and vocational rehabilitation services. Authority for DCHV does not expire.
- **Compensated Work Therapy/ Transitional Residence Program (CWT/TR):** CWT gives veterans with disabilities work experience and skills so that they may re-enter the workforce and maintain employment on their own. The TR component to CWT provides housing to CWT participants who have mental illnesses or chronic substance use disorders and who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The TR component of CWT is authorized through FY2022 (P.L. 116-159).
- **Grant and Per Diem Program (GPD):** GPD authorizes the VA to make grants to public entities or private nonprofit organizations to provide services and transitional housing to homeless veterans, with a focus on achieving permanent housing. The program is authorized at \$258 million in FY2015 and subsequent years (P.L. 114-228).
- **GPD for Homeless Veterans with Special Needs:** GPD for homeless veterans with special needs, authorized at \$5 million through FY2022 (P.L. 116-159), targets GPD funds to specific groups of veterans, including women, elderly veterans, terminally or mentally ill veterans, and veterans with children.
- **Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF):** SSVF funds grants for supportive services to assist very low-income veterans and their families who are either

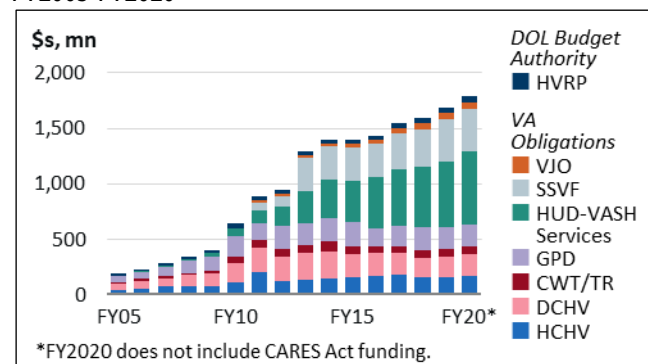
residing in permanent housing or transitioning from homelessness. Eligible services include assistance with rent, utility or moving costs, outreach, case management, and help with obtaining VA and other mainstream benefits. The program is authorized at \$420 million through FY2022 by P.L. 116-159.

- **Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO):** VJO specialists reach out to veterans who are involved in the criminal justice system for matters not resulting in imprisonment to ensure that they have access to VA mental health and substance use treatment and other VA benefits for which they are eligible. In 2009, VA directed that each medical center designate a VJO specialist pursuant to its authority to prevent veteran homelessness.

DOL Programs

- **Homeless Veterans Reintegration Programs (HVRP):** HVRP grantees provide services to veterans including outreach, assistance in interview preparation, job search, job training, and follow-up assistance after placement. The program is authorized at \$50 million through FY2022 (P.L. 116-159). A separate HVRP targets women veterans and veterans with children and is authorized through FY2022 at \$1 million (P.L. 116-159).
- **Incarcerated Veterans Transition Program:** The Incarcerated Veterans Transition program funds grantee organizations to provide job training and placement services to veterans who are leaving prison. P.L. 116-315 removed the program's sunset date.

Figure 1. Funding for Select Programs FY2005-FY2020



Source: VA and DOL budget justifications. Created by CRS.

HUD and VA Collaborative Program

HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH): Through HUD-VASH, homeless veterans receive rental assistance in the form of Section 8 vouchers from HUD and supportive services from the VA. Begun as a three-year inter-agency collaboration in the 1990s, Congress has funded new VASH vouchers in each year from FY2008-FY2021. Funding for HUD-VASH was last authorized in FY2011.

HUD and VA together determine how vouchers are allocated across the country. The majority of HUD-VASH vouchers are tenant-based, meaning that veterans can use them to rent available units on the private rental market (subject to program rules). A small portion of the vouchers have been issued competitively as project-based vouchers and are attached to specific units of housing.

The FY2015 appropriations law (P.L. 113-235) provided that funds be set aside for a demonstration for Native American homeless or at-risk veterans who are living on or near reservations. In 2016, vouchers sufficient to serve 500 veterans were awarded to 26 tribes. Funding has been renewed in subsequent appropriations, and HUD announced funding for approximately 95 new vouchers in 2021.

See **Table 1** for total funding for new VASH vouchers and the number of vouchers awarded. Funding supports VASH vouchers for one year, after which they are absorbed into the Section 8 account. Cumulatively, as of the date of this In Focus, funds were sufficient to support more than 106,000 vouchers. (The number of vouchers currently available may differ from the amount that were initially awarded.)

Table 1. HUD-VASH Vouchers, FY2008-FY2021

\$835 million appropriated for new vouchers	100,534 tenant-based vouchers awarded	5,416 project-based vouchers awarded	595 tribal vouchers awarded
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Source: Appropriations laws and HUD funding announcements.

Resources to End Veteran Homelessness

In 2009, the VA announced a plan to end veteran homelessness by the end of FY2015. While the VA did not reach its goal within that time, it continues to focus on reducing the number of veterans experiencing homelessness. From the time the announcement was made, obligations for targeted VA homeless veterans programs have increased from \$376 million in FY2009 to more than \$1.8 billion in FY2020 (as of the date of this In Focus, final FY2021 obligations were not available). **Figure 1** shows funding for select homeless veteran programs. (Note that the figure does not represent all VA funding and includes DOL budget authority.) During the same period, healthcare obligations for homeless veterans have increased from \$2.5 billion to nearly \$7.8 billion. Additional funding, not reflected in **Figure 1**, was also appropriated to assist veterans through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (P.L. 116-136). See **Table 2**.

Table 2. CARES Act Funding for VA Programs

VA Program	\$ in Millions
Supportive Services for Veteran Families	602
Grant and Per Diem Program	88
Health Care for Homeless Veterans	10

Source: VA funding announcements.

Numbers and Characteristics

As funding for homeless veteran programs and healthcare has increased, the number of veterans reported to be experiencing homelessness has declined. HUD directs

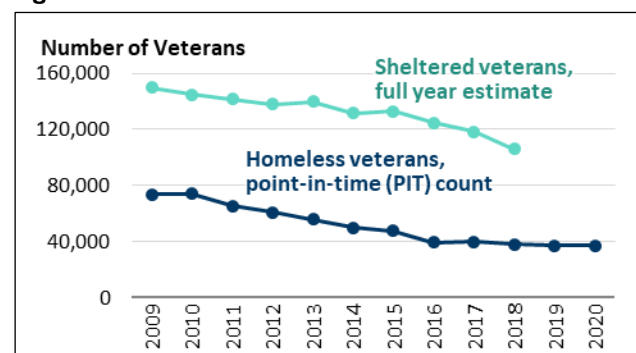
annual point-in-time (PIT) counts of homeless individuals who are both sheltered (living in emergency shelter or transitional housing) and unsheltered (living on the street or other places not meant for human habitation). The PIT count takes place on one day during the last week of January each year. According to the PIT count, the number of veterans experiencing homelessness has declined from 73,367 in 2009 to 37,252 in 2020. See the lower line in **Figure 2**.

PIT data for 2021 only include the number of veterans living in shelter and do not include those living on the street or other places not meant for human habitation. The number of sheltered veterans in 2021 was 19,750, compared to 22,048 in 2020.

The PIT count does not capture veterans who experience homelessness at other times during the year. HUD uses data from a sample of jurisdictions for full-year estimates of veterans experiencing homelessness, but the data only include veterans who are sheltered (living in emergency shelter or transitional housing), not those living on the street or other places not meant for human habitation.

In FY2009 149,635 veterans were estimated to be homeless and living in emergency shelter or transitional housing over the course of the year. By FY2018, the most recent year in which data are available as of the date of this In Focus, the number had decreased to 105,820 veterans. See the upper line in **Figure 2**.

Figure 2. Number of Homeless Veterans



Source: HUD Annual Homeless Assessment Reports (AHARs) to Congress, <https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/ahar/>. Created by CRS.

According to HUD data from FY2018 full-year estimates, veterans living in emergency shelter and transitional housing are primarily men (92%) and the majority (66%) have a disability. While nearly 60% of all veterans are age 65 and older (59%), veterans in the 45-54 and 55-64 age groups make up 62% of the homeless veteran population (23% and 39%, respectively). African American veterans are overrepresented compared to their percentages in the overall veteran population—40% of homeless veterans are African American (compared to about 10% of all veterans). Non-Hispanic White veterans are underrepresented, making up 81% of all veterans but approximately 49% of homeless veterans.

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