

# **OPENING DOORS IN WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS**

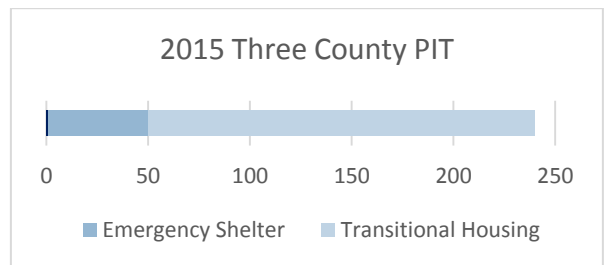
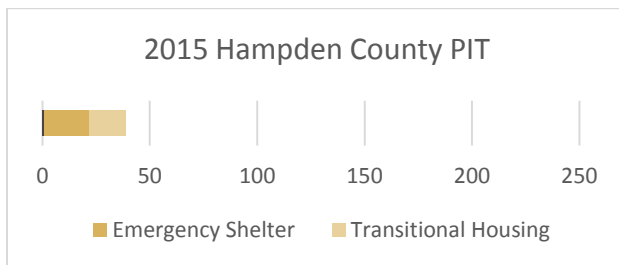
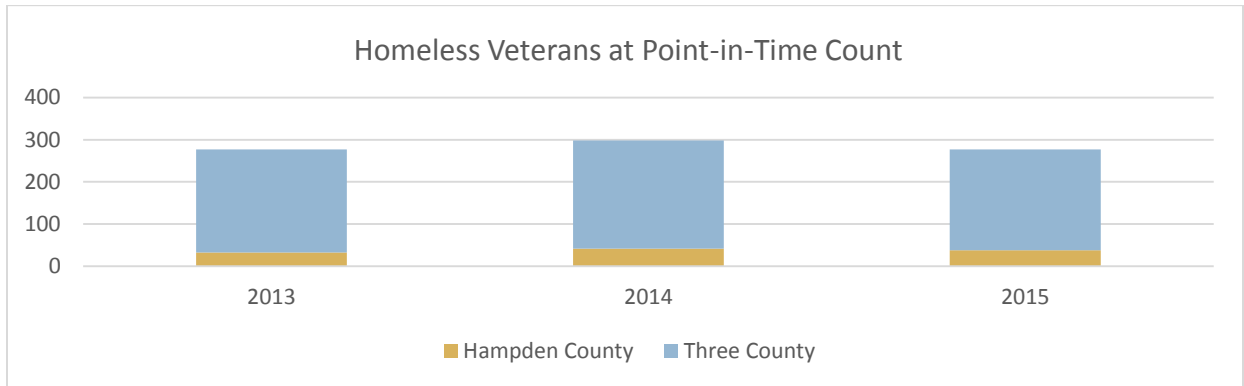
## **ROADMAP FOR ENDING VETERAN HOMELESSNESS**

Reaching and maintaining functional zero

**DRAFT** December 2015

## DATA: Understand the problem

**Point-in-Time Count.** At a given time, there are 250-300 homeless veterans in Western Massachusetts, with the majority of those in transitional housing. About 70 are in emergency shelter. At the last point-in-time count in January 2015, there were no unsheltered homeless veterans identified. There were no confirmed chronically homeless veterans in the region.



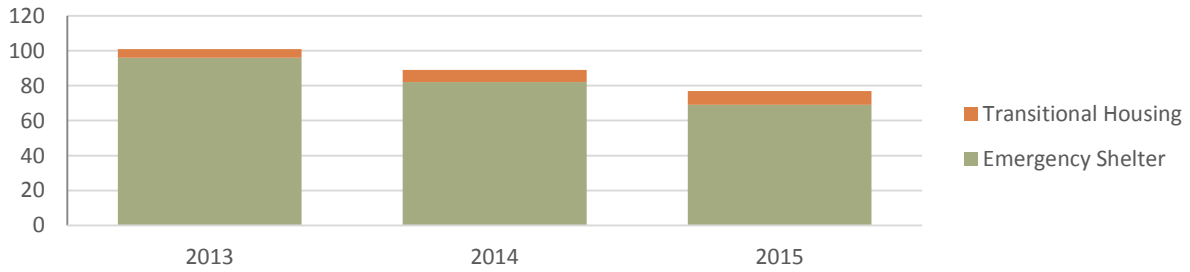
**Annual Estimate/Take-Down Targets.** The VA has created estimates of the number of veterans who would be expected to experience homelessness during the course of a year, based on the number identified at the point-in-time count. The Zero 2016 campaign calls this estimated annual number the community’s “take-down target,” which is the number of veterans that must be housed during the year to reach and maintain the goal of ending veteran homelessness. The table below shows the number of homeless veterans estimated for all of 2015 based on the number identified in the January 2015 point-in-time count.

	2015 PIT	Estimated Annual In-Flow	Estimated Annual Housing Need
Hampden	38	66	104
3 County	239	442	681
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>504</b>	<b>785</b>

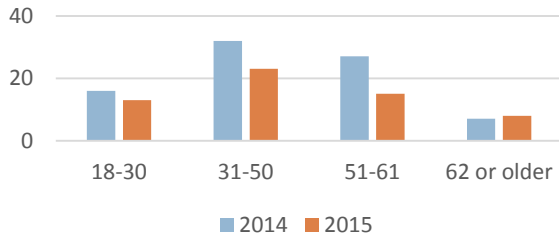
**Annual Homeless Assessment Report.** Each Continuum of Care (CoC) submits an annual report to HUD for the Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR), which comes from data in the CoC’s Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). This covers emergency shelter and transitional housing that reports HMIS data, but excludes programs that do not participate in HMIS. Although the data set is incomplete, it provides demographic and comparison data useful for planning.

## Summary of Hampden County AHAR Veterans Data

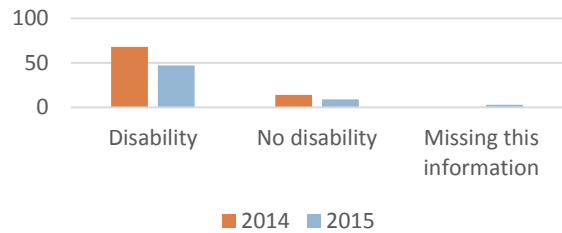
### Total Unduplicated Veterans accessing ES or TH during the year



### Age

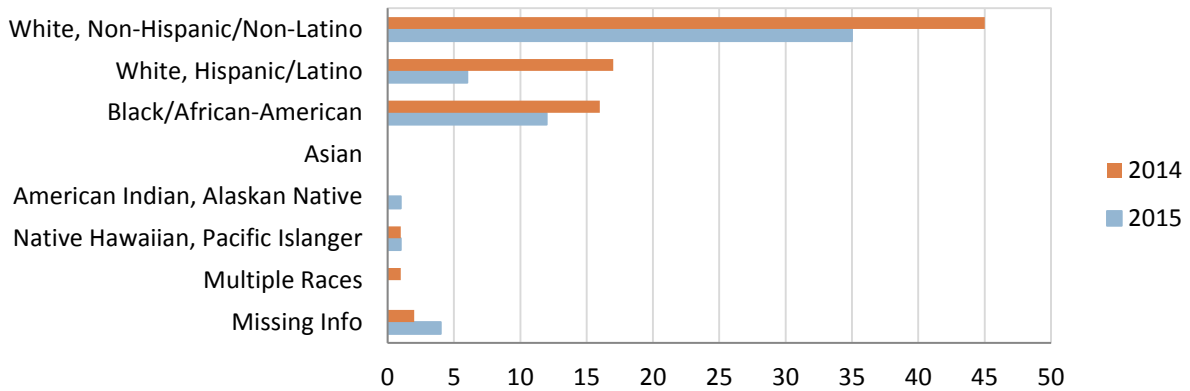


### Disability

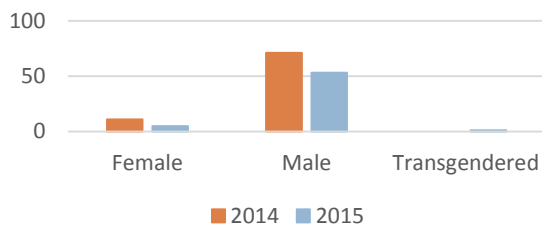


The 2015 AHAR further broke down the age of veterans in the 18-30 group. In 2015, 4 veterans were 18-24 years old, and 9 veterans were 25-30 years old.

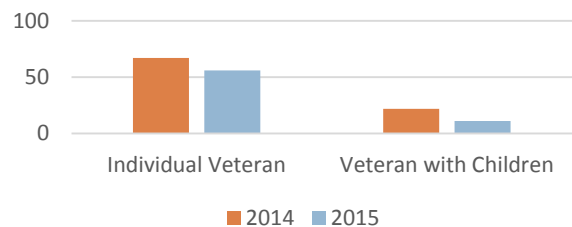
### Race & Ethnicity



### Gender



### Family Status



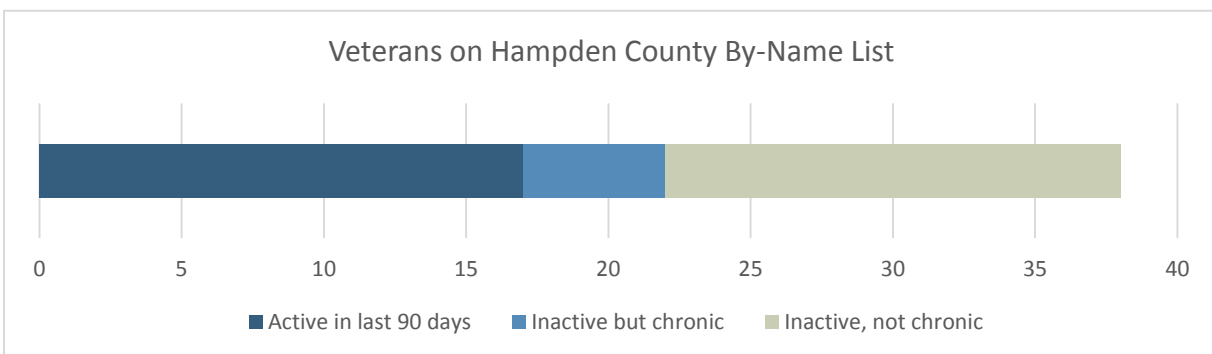
The Hampden County AHAR data supports several conclusions:

- The annual number of Veterans accessing homeless services in covered programs has declined between 2013 and 2015
- While the majority of homeless Veterans are between 31 and 61 years old, there are homeless Veterans at all age ranges 18 and older
- The majority of homeless Veterans accessing covered programs are male, on their own, and disabled, but there are some Veteran women and families experiencing homelessness
- The largest percentage of homeless Veterans accessing services in covered programs are Non-Hispanic White, but there are also significant numbers of Black and Hispanic Veterans accessing homeless services

**By-Name List.** The Hampden County CoC has begun tracking veterans who are homeless through a by-name list, which identifies homeless veterans in HMIS and through ongoing collaboration with outreach workers, hospitals, and police departments. The list is maintained by the CoC and updated at least monthly. The 3 County CoC is in the process of creating a by-name list, which it expects to begin using in January 2016.

For the Hampden County list, individual veterans are moved to inactive status if there has been no contact or use of shelter for 90 days. If someone on the inactive list is contacted, they are moved back to the active list. Use of the list over time will provide more accurate data regarding current numbers of homeless veterans, monthly in-flow, and housing placement rates. The list also ensures that every homeless veteran is contacted and is offered services and housing.

As of December 1, 2015, there are 38 confirmed veterans on the Hampden County list, as follows:



Those identified as “inactive but chronic” are individuals who are repeatedly in HMIS over a period of years but have not been in shelter or identified as unsheltered in the last 90 days—they do not necessarily meet the HUD definition of chronically homeless. The CoC expects that these are individuals who are frequently unsheltered but may also spend time doubled up or in the hospital, jail, etc. Those on the list who are “inactive but not chronic” have been identified some time in the past year, but do not have a lengthy history of identified homelessness, and have not been seen in the last 90 days. Many of these individuals have had just one brief stay in shelter and are never encountered again.

**SQUARES.** The Veterans Administration has made available to CoCs a repository of veteran information, which allows CoC representatives to check for veteran status of a particular individual, if the individual’s name, date of birth, and social security number are known. The site is [www.hmisrepository.va.gov](http://www.hmisrepository.va.gov), and it verifies whether a particular individual has served in the U.S. Military. The Hampden County CoC uses SQUARES to confirm veteran status of individuals on the by-name list, and to screen chronically homeless and unsheltered people for veteran status.

**Veteran Housing Placements.** The VA provides monthly information about veterans housed with veteran permanent housing assistance programs (VASH and SSVF). The Hampden County CoC also tracks Veterans housed through CoC or other programs. The following table provides information for the 10-month period January 2015 through October 2015.

	VA-reported Veteran Housing Placements	CoC-reported Veteran Housing Placements	Total Veteran Housing Placements	Average Monthly Housing Placements
Hampden County	43 <sup>1</sup>	8	51	5.1
3 County	240	Unk.	240	24

**What Data is Missing?** Data helps the CoCs and Network understand the population, its needs, and gaps in the service delivery system. Opportunities to improve data access and use include:

**Comprehensive HMIS coverage.** AHAR data only reports on persons entered into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). When shelter and transitional housing agencies do not use HMIS, their clients’ data is not collected, and it can make clients more difficult to find when housing assistance can be offered to them. In addition, the inclusion of permanent housing targeted to this population can make it possible to automate reports showing how many veterans are housed each month—SSVF and VASH data are particularly important for this task.

**Analysis of repeat vs. first-time homelessness.** Some veterans receive housing assistance and become homeless again. Identification of these veterans and their characteristics can assist in developing strategies to provide ongoing housing assistance or a new housing intervention after failure.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the number reported by the VA. VA and VASH providers have reported housing a total of 66 Veterans during the same period. The difference may be explained by provider-reported counts inadvertently including doubled up veterans or veterans who originated outside Hampden County but used their assistance within Hampden County.

## GOALS: Ending veteran homelessness

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The Network has committed to ending veteran homelessness. What it means to end veteran homelessness is creation of a system that quickly identifies any veteran who experiences a housing crisis and assists that veteran to access new housing immediately. The goal is to end the long-term accepted status quo in which homeless veterans remain for months or years on the streets or in shelters.

There have been two frameworks for defining “ending veteran homelessness”: one described by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), and the other by the Zero 2016 Campaign.

**USICH.** The USICH has established the following criteria and benchmarks for ending veteran homelessness:

Criteria
Identify all Veterans experiencing homelessness (by-name list)
Provide shelter immediately to any homeless veteran who wants it
Provide service-intensive TH only in limited instances
Assist Veterans to swiftly move into permanent housing
Sufficient resources and system capacity to assist new homeless/at-risk Veterans in the future

Benchmarks
Chronic homelessness among veterans has been ended
Veterans access permanent housing in 90 days or less
There is sufficient permanent housing capacity
Commitment to Housing First; use of transitional housing only in limited instances

Western Massachusetts has made considerable progress toward these criteria and benchmarks.

Successes include:

- No chronically homeless veterans
- Available shelter with sufficient capacity and lack of restrictions
- Sufficient permanent housing capacity for veterans
- Broad commitment to Housing First

Work still in process includes:

- 3 County CoC is in the process of creating a by-name list
- Providers, outreach and housing resources do not yet work so smoothly together that all veterans are able to access housing within 90 days; there is a need to improve outreach and referrals
- Difficult to stay in contact with unsheltered veterans
- Transitional housing may be used more frequently than necessary

**Zero 2016: Functional Zero.** The Zero 2016 campaign has set a target of “functional zero” for its definition of having ended Veteran homelessness. Functional zero means: at any point in time, the number of Veterans experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness is no greater than the current monthly housing placement rate for Veterans experiencing homelessness.

Functional Zero Metrics	
PIT count includes complete coverage for unsheltered population and interviews people not in HMIS	
Track housing placements; calculate 12-month placement average	
75%+ of Veterans served by HUD and VA programs obtain permanent housing at program exit	
75%+ of projects follow a Housing First approach	
0 unsheltered veterans during point-in-time count	

The Hampden County CoC has been tracking progress toward functional zero. By its calculation, it has been housing 7 homeless Veterans per month; however, data provided by the VA indicates that it is actually housing 5.1 Veterans per month. The VA’s estimate is that the Hampden County CoC must house a total of 104 Veterans per year, which is an average of 8.6 Veterans per month. While the CoC is making strong progress, it needs to increase its housing rate to meet the goal of functional zero.

**Components of Ending Veteran Homelessness.** While the USICH and Zero 2016 metrics inform whether the goal of ending veteran homelessness has been met, there are also components to achievement of the goal that can also be tracked. These include:

**First-Time Homelessness among Veterans.** Prevention efforts can reduce the number of Veterans who become homeless for the first time. Measuring the number of Veterans who become homeless for the first time during the year provides information about whether prevention programs are targeting appropriately and intervening effectively.

**Repeat Homelessness for Veterans.**

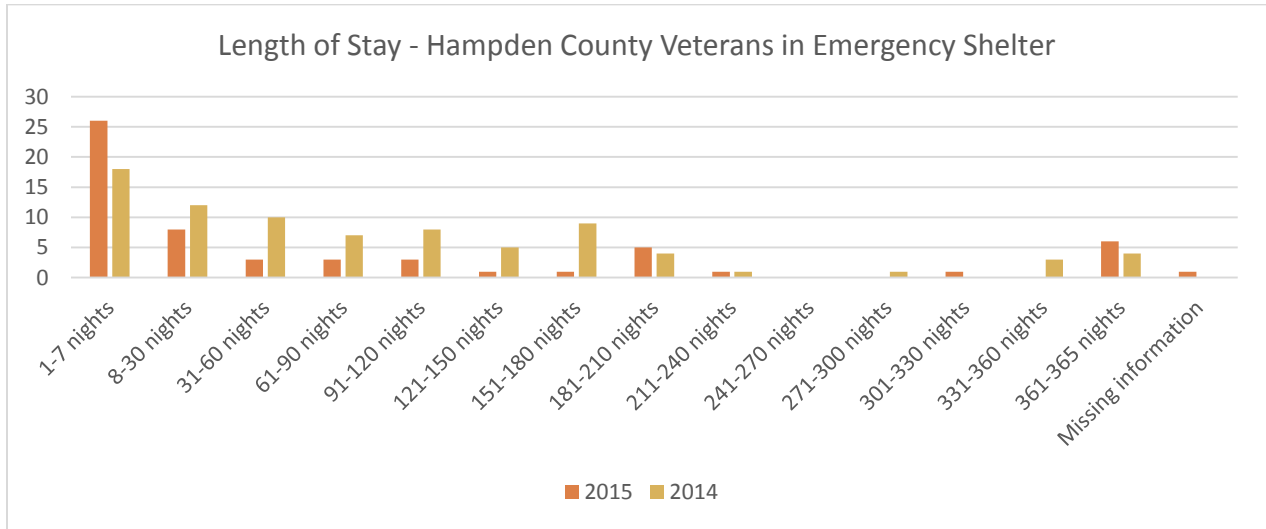
- Increase PSH/VASH retention rate
- Strategies to quickly identify those who are unsuccessful in PSH/VASH and identify alternate solutions

**Length of Homelessness.** The USICH has set a benchmark for assisting Veterans to become housed within 90 days of entering shelter, but notes that high-performing communities have been able to reduce that to 30 days.

Hampden County has reviewed AHAR data that indicates length of stay for Veterans during the course of a year. The following shows the percentages of Veterans who have exited shelter within 30 days and 90 days of entering.

	2014	2015
Shelter stay of 30 days or less	34%	54%
Shelter stay of 90 days or less	56%	58%

The following graph, based on AHAR data, illustrates the lengths of stay for all veterans over the course of a year.



In reviewing the graph, note that the clusters of Veterans in shelter for more than 330 days are Veterans in the family shelter system.

A key limitation of this data is that it reflects length of stay only in shelters which use HMIS. Critically, information about periods of being unsheltered or staying in a non-HMIS shelter (such as the Springfield Rescue Mission) is not included.



## RESOURCES: What's in the toolbox?

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### HOUSING RESOURCES

**Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH).** PSH includes affordable (subsidized) housing plus individualized support services.

**HUD-VASH.** The HUD-VASH Program is a joint effort between HUD and VA to move Veterans and their families out of homelessness and into permanent housing. HUD provides housing assistance through its Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8) that allows homeless Veterans to rent privately owned housing. VA offers eligible homeless Veterans clinical and supportive services through its health care system.

HUD-VASH is available throughout Western Massachusetts. Homeless Veterans access the HUD-VASH program through the VA. Once approved by the VA, Veterans are referred to the Northampton Housing Authority, which operates the housing voucher portion of the program throughout Western Massachusetts.

Eligibility criteria for HUD-VASH are:

- Veteran in need of case management services
- Must be eligible for VA Health Care
  - Active duty in the U.S. military
  - Any discharge other than dishonorable
  - If enlisted after September 7, 1980 or entered active duty after October 16, 1981, must have service for 24 uninterrupted months or have been discharged due to a service-connected disability or for hardship
- Must meet HUD section 8 eligibility requirements
  - Income eligibility
  - No member of household required to maintain Lifetime Sexual Offender Registry status

**CoC PSH.** CoC providers operate permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless individuals and families. The Hampden County Continuum of Care has created a priority for non-VA-eligible veterans in its PSH units. The units are accessed through a coordinated entry process. Vulnerable veterans who are not eligible for VASH or who are unwilling to engage with the VA are automatically added to the coordinated entry by-name list once they are identified.

**Veteran Housing Under Construction.** There are several housing developments under construction which will provide permanent supportive housing to veterans. These include:

	Address	Units	Planned Opening Date
Bilingual Veterans Outreach Center	60 Cass St., Springfield	20	March 2016
Soldier On	40 Meadow St., Chicopee	40	
Soldier On	421 Main St., Northampton	44	
Soldier On	S. Westfield St., Agawam	54	

## **Time-Limited Services and Housing Support (Prevention and Rapid Rehousing)**

**Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF).** SSVF is operated by local non-profit agencies with the aim of improving the housing stability of very low-income Veteran families through outreach, case management, connection to VA benefits and programs, connection to public benefits and mainstream, community resources and temporary financial assistance.

Eligibility criteria for SSVF are:

- Member of a veteran family
- Very low-income
- Literally homeless or in permanent housing and at-risk of literal homelessness

SSVF is available throughout Western Massachusetts. Agencies that provide SSVF are Veterans, Inc. (throughout Western Massachusetts), Soldier On (Berkshire, Franklin and Hampshire Counties), and Springfield Partners for Community Action (Hampden County).

## **Other Permanent Housing.**

**Housing Targeted to Veterans.** Some housing is only available to veterans.

- Vikings Landing – Easthampton, 19 units, SRO, for male veterans (operated by South Middle Opportunity Council)

**Public Housing Authority Preferences.** Many towns and cities have public housing authorities, which provide affordable housing through several programs: federal public housing, housing choice voucher/section 8 program, state public housing, and the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP). A particular housing authority may provide one, several, or all of these programs. The state-funded programs—public housing and MRVP—include the following preferences:

- Homeless due to fire, natural disaster, an urban renewal project, or condemnation by a local board of health or inspectional services;
- Have a housing emergency. This is defined by each housing authority, but includes people who are facing domestic violence, have severe medical emergencies, or are homeless or have been evicted through no fault of their own (or under a stay of execution in a no-fault eviction);
- Have an Alternative Housing Voucher for people with disabilities and their families and need to relocate;
- or Already live in public housing and need to transfer for good cause.

Within these preferences, there is also a preference for Veterans. This means that, between people who meet the preference standards above, Veterans will be given preference over others.

If a veteran is homeless and qualifies for a state preference, the veteran can choose a preference for local residence either in the last community where the veteran was a tenant or the community where the veteran is in shelter.

State report: Currently, state-aided public housing has a preference in place for veterans, and homeless veterans have an even higher preference.

### **Transitional Housing**

**The VA Grant and Per Diem Program.** The VA makes funds available to agencies to build and operate service-enriched transitional housing programs for veterans. Soldier On operates a Grant and Per Diem Program in Leeds, Massachusetts.

**Non-VA Transitional Housing.** The region includes two transitional housing programs that are specifically for veterans. Transitional housing provides housing and support services to a Veteran for a period of up to 2 years.

- Turner House Living Center for Veterans, 825 Simmonds Rd., Williamstown
- Jorge Bareto Homeless Veterans Transitional Program, 52 Maple Court, Springfield (operated by Bi-Lingual Veterans Outreach Center)

### **Domiciliary Care (for veterans unable to live independently)**

**Soldiers Home.** Massachusetts Soldiers' Homes provide a variety of services to veterans, including domiciliary and long-term care. One of the state's Soldiers' Homes is in Holyoke.

## **FINANCIAL BENEFITS AND SERVICES**

**Financial assistance: Massachusetts Chap 115 benefits.** Massachusetts provides financial assistance to qualifying veterans and their dependents receive necessary financial assistance. Veterans apply for Chapter 115 benefits through the Veteran Service Officer (VSO) in their town.

**Disability benefits: SSI/SSDI.** In addition to veteran-specific benefits, disabled veterans may also be eligible for federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). A veteran can start an application for SSI or SSDI online, by phone, or by visiting a local Social Security office.

**Employment.** (Are there programs/efforts to link veterans that access SSVF to employment?)

**Discharge Upgrades.** The VASH program is available to Veterans with a discharge status that is other than dishonorable. A veteran with a dishonorable discharge may attempt to get the discharge upgraded. The following agencies may be able to assist with seeking discharge upgrades:

Bi-Lingual Veterans Outreach Center

**Documents – DD214, birth cert, social security card**

## **PREVENTION: Stop homelessness before it happens**

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### **Eviction prevention**

- SSVF prevention screening tool
- Information available at Housing Court?
- PHAs – early intervention; at-risk should be referred to VSO

### **Substance abuse**

- Veterans being released from SA treatment

### **Criminal justice system**

- Veterans Treatment Court at the Holyoke District Court
  - Serves Hampden, Hampshire and Franklin Counties
  - Veterans accepted into court supervision have pled guilty to a misdemeanor or less serious felony offense and receive supervised treatment instead of a jail sentence

## OUTREACH: Find and assist every homeless veteran

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**Emergency Shelter.** Shelters that provide data to HMIS request standard data elements for each person served, and the data elements include a request regarding veteran status. There are two key ways that a person identifying veteran status will be flagged for receipt of information and referrals for veterans: 1) regular review of HMIS records for veteran status; and 2) identification by shelter intake or case management staff.

Regular review and maintenance of a by-name list includes regular review of HMIS records to identify persons with veteran status. The Hampden County CoC is reviewing HMIS records monthly to identify new veterans. Any newly-identified veterans are added to the by-name list,

### **Unsheltered Veterans**

- Coordination with police regarding unsheltered homeless
- Use of SQUARES to identify veteran status among street homeless
- Outreach to unsheltered veterans – peer outreach

Peer to peer outreach

## **COORDINATION: Everyone sharing information & working together**

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### **Protocols for making connections/referrals**

#### **Coordinated Entry**

#### **Training Needs/Issues**

- Critical Time Intervention
- Trauma-informed care

MassVetsAdvisor.org

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# VETERAN HOMELESSNESS 2016 WORKPLAN

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## Items to consider for incorporation into workplan:

### Network Veteran Committee

- Training for shelter staff; development of veteran resource referral handout
- Coordination and referral – develop written protocols
- Strategies to attract landlords
- PHAs – make sure applying preference; connect re prevention programs; training for PHA staff

### Joint Veteran Committee-CoC

- Data-sharing protocols
- Protocols re use of veteran-specific transitional housing?

### CoCs

- Data Issues – increase HMIS coverage
- By-Name List – develop policies and procedures

Such CoC subcommittees will be responsible for identifying homeless and at-risk veterans, maintaining an HMIS database, and developing written standards to determine the type and amount of resources required to stabilize and house local veterans based on a vulnerability index.

## Appendix

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### Data Tables

Veterans Homeless at a Point-in-Time (last Wednesday in January)

	Unsheltered		Emergency Shelter		Transitional Housing		Total		Western MA Total
	Hampden	3 County	Hampden	3 County	Hampden	3 County	Hampden	3 County	
2015	0	0	21	49	17	190	38	239	277
2014	1	0	23	22	18	234	42	256	298
2013	1	0	14		18		33	222	255

Individual Veterans Experiencing Homelessness during the course of the year – from HMIS

	Emergency Shelter		Transitional Housing		Total		Western MA Total
	Hampden	3 County	Hampden	3 County	Hampden	3 County	
2015	58						
2014	60		7		67		
2013	92		5		97		



## **Terms and Definitions**

Chronically Homeless

Continuum of Care

Functional Zero

Homeless

Homeless Management Information System

SQUARES

SRO

SSVF

VASH

VSO

Zero 2016

## Resources – Providers, Programs and Contacts

Bi-lingual Veterans Outreach	281 Franklin St, Springfield, MA 01104	(413) 731-0194	Advocacy re discharge upgrades Sober transitional housing Sober permanent housing
Holyoke Soldiers Home	110 Cherry Street Holyoke, MA 01041	413-532-9475, ext. 136	Domiciliary and long-term care
Social Security Administration	70 Bond Street Springfield, MA 01104  Second Floor 200 High Street Holyoke, MA 01040	1-800-772-1213	Social Security Card Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
Soldier On	421 North Main Street Building 6 Leeds, MA 01053  360 West Housatonic Street Pittsfield, MA 01201	(413) 582-3059  (413) 236-5644	SSVF Emergency shelter Transitional Housing Permanent housing
South Middlesex Opportunity Council – Vikings Landing			SRO housing
Springfield Partners for Community Action	721 State St, Springfield, MA 01109	(413) 263-6500	SSVF
Springfield Vet Center	95 Ashley Avenue, Suite A West Springfield, MA 01089	413-737-5167 or 877-927-8387	Readjustment counseling and services
Turner House	P.O. Box 71, Williamstown, MA	(413) 458-8234	Sober transitional housing
VA Medical Center	421 North Main Street Leeds, MA 01053		
VA Community Based Outpatient Clinics	143 Munson Street Greenfield, MA 01301  73 Eagle Street Pittsfield, MA 01201  25 Bond Street Springfield, MA 01104	413-773-8428  413-499-2672  413-731-6000	
Veterans, Inc.	1 Federal St Springfield, MA 01105	413-733-1249	SSVF
VSOs			

**Do you have a history of U.S. military service?** YES NO

If yes, refer the veteran to the Statewide Advocacy for Veterans' Empowerment (SAVE) team. They can assist with accessing every available veteran resource.

Call: 617-210-5743 or e-mail: [save@massmail.state.ma.us](mailto:save@massmail.state.ma.us).

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**Important to know:**

**1. Is the veteran eligible for VA Healthcare?**

**YES:** Explore VA resources. [http://benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/benefits\\_summary\\_materials.asp](http://benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/benefits_summary_materials.asp)

**NO:** Ask if they have ever actually checked with the VA and if they are certain they are not eligible (many people are eligible but unaware). If not, recommend that they contact the VA Health Eligibility Center to find out.

**DON'T KNOW:** Many veterans are unsure if they are eligible for VA or *incorrectly assume that they are not*. Recommend that they contact the VA Health Eligibility Center to find out.

**VA Health Eligibility Center: 1-877-222-8387.** The veteran needs to be the one to call to give name, social security number, and date of birth. The center will be able to tell them if they are eligible for VA health care and/or if they are already enrolled.

If they are eligible but not enrolled, they will need to complete a 2 page Health Benefit Application called the 1010 EZ. The Health Eligibility Center will send this form to the veteran with instructions for completion, but this form can also be easily found with an internet search (type in "VA form 1010EZ")

**Completed forms should be sent to:** VA Medical Center 421 N. Main St. Leeds, MA 01053 ATTN: Business Office

**2. Is the veteran eligible for Massachusetts Veterans Benefits and Services?**

**YES:** Recommend that the veteran contact the Veteran Service Officer (VSO) in their town to inquire about eligibility for chapter 115 benefits, given their current housing situation.

**NO:** Ask if they have ever checked and if they are certain they are not (many people are eligible but unaware.) If not, refer the veteran to the SAVE team (see above.)

**DON'T KNOW:** Refer to the SAVE team (see above).

**Contact information for all VSO's by town can be found at** [www.mass.gov/veterans](http://www.mass.gov/veterans)

**3. IS the veteran eligible for Supportive Services for Veterans and Families (SSVF)?**

**YES:** Contact Soldier On at 866-406-8449 or Veterans Inc at 800-482-2565. Veterans Inc. also serves ME, VT, NH, CT, and RI. Soldier On also serves NY, NJ, PA, and MI.

**NO:** Ask if they have ever checked with Soldier On or Veterans Inc. An individual who served in the military is most likely eligible for SSVF assistance even if they are not able to access VA or DVS resources.

**DON'T KNOW:** Many veterans assume that if they don't meet VA criteria that they are not eligible for veteran services. **Any individual who served 1 day of federal active duty and received a discharge other than dishonorable is eligible for SSVF.**