



They Don't Have to Do it Alone:

A Preliminary Inquiry into Supports and Services for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness in San Diego County

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Glossary of Terms

By-Name-List (BNL): An up-to-date, comprehensive list of all individuals within a community that are currently experiencing homelessness.

Continuum of Care (CoC): A local planning body responsible for the coordination and oversight of the full range of homelessness services for a designated geographic region, such as a city, county, metropolitan area or the entire state.

Discharge Status: A characterization of service according to the Department of Defense that describes an individual's conduct and performance during their military service, which affect their access to U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA benefits and services). Discharge statuses are classified into two categories: 1) administrative, resulting in Honorable, General (under honorable conditions), and Other than Honorable discharges and 2) punitive, resulting in Bad Conduct, Dishonorable, and Dismissal discharge statuses.¹

Functional Zero: A milestone for communities involved in Community Solutions' Built for Zero initiative, where homelessness in a specified population has been reduced such that it is "rare and brief."²

Homeless Court: A diversionary program that provides people experiencing homelessness with the opportunity to resolve infractions, low-level felonies and/or misdemeanor offenses.

Homelessness (sheltered and unsheltered): The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines homelessness under four categories: 1) literally homeless, 2) imminent risk of homelessness, 3) homeless under other federal statutes, and 4) fleeing/attempting to flee domestic violence.³

Housing First: An evidence-based approach that prioritizes rapid access to permanent housing without barriers such as sobriety requirements or conditions based on criminal records.

Housing Inventory Count (HIC): An annual count of the number of housing units and beds available, by program type and sub-population, to serve individuals experiencing homelessness or residing in permanent supportive housing.

HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH): A voucher program that combines rental assistance from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s Housing Choice Voucher with supportive services and case management from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) to assist veterans experiencing homelessness (VEH) in obtaining and maintaining permanent housing.

Point-in-Time Count (PITC): An annual count of the number of unsheltered and sheltered individuals experiencing homelessness on a single night in January.

Project-Based Voucher: HUD-VASH vouchers that are attached to an affordable housing development with funded units set aside for veterans experiencing homelessness.

Public Housing Agency (PHA): Local housing agency that receives funding from HUD to manage public housing programs that are designated to serve income-eligible low-income individuals and families, the elderly and individuals with disabilities.

Sheltered Homelessness: Individuals and families who are living in supervised shelters, transitional housing programs, hotels, or safe havens as opposed to places such as sidewalks, parks or vehicles, which are not meant for human habitation. This does not include individuals or families that are doubling up or staying in the City of San Diego's Safe Sleeping encampments.

Stand Down: An annual event that provides resources and services to veterans experiencing homelessness.

Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF): A VA grant that targets low-income veterans by combining rapid rehousing and homelessness prevention services to quickly rehouse VEH, prevent at-risk veterans from experiencing homelessness, and to help them retain permanent housing.⁴

Tenant-Choice Voucher: HUD-VASH vouchers awarded to the VEH directly, who can then apply it towards a privately-owned unit of their choice, provided the landlord accepts it.

Unsheltered Homelessness: Individuals and families whose nighttime residence is a place not meant for human habitation such as sidewalks, parks, or vehicles.

Veteran Experiencing Homelessness (VEH): Any individual “who served in the military and does not have a permanent residence.”⁵

Veteran Homelessness Serving Organization (VHSO): An organization that specifically provides housing support, direct housing or services that specifically target homeless or at-risk veterans.

Veteran-Serving Organization (VSO): An organization that doesn’t specifically serve VEH, but offers military-specific/veteran programs that at-risk veterans or transitioning service members can utilize to prevent the experience of homelessness.

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Executive Summary

Homelessness Hub at UC San Diego conducted an exploratory investigation into the San Diego region's ecosystem of emergency and temporary housing and services for veterans experiencing homelessness (VEH). Key findings are highlighted below and discussed in more detail in the report:

Trends Over Time in Veteran Homelessness in San Diego

- Rates of veteran homelessness in San Diego are declining faster than at the state or national level. **Between 2013 and 2025, veteran homelessness in San Diego declined 56.7%.** This decline was more pronounced than those witnessed in the state of California or nationally.
- The San Diego region has experienced a dramatic increase in the number of tenant-choice HUD-VASH vouchers. **Between 2013 and 2025, San Diego County experienced a significant expansion in tenant-choice HUD-VASH vouchers. The number of vouchers increased by approximately 215.5 percent, from 957 to just over 3,000.**
- HUD-VASH tenant-choice voucher utilization rates fluctuated between 2013-2024 with a low of 66.1% in 2023. **HUD-VASH tenant choice voucher utilization rates reached their highest level in 2017 at 89%. In 2024, the HUD-VASH utilization rate was 82.1% with 2,478 vouchers in use.**

Key Initiatives and Organizations Supporting Veterans Experiencing Homelessness

- San Diego has a rich history of efforts to address veteran homelessness and has been a national leader and innovator. Both Stand Down and Homeless Court have their origins in San Diego. These models of outreach to VEH have since been implemented nationally.
- Two local initiatives, the City of San Diego's *1000 Homeless Veterans Initiative/Housing Our Heroes* (2016) and the County of San Diego's *Leave No Veteran Homeless Initiative* (2023), have both led to measurable reductions in veteran homelessness.
- San Diego has an extensive infrastructure of organizations that provide resources and services to veterans, with a subset that are specifically focused on serving VEH. **Countywide, at least 42 organizations serve VEH.**

Veteran-serving organizations in San Diego have a reputation for collaboration, referred to by some as the “San Diego Way.”

Challenges and Successes Working with Veterans Experiencing Homelessness

- Service providers and VEH report both challenges as well as successes in ending veteran homelessness:
 - Common barriers to providing services to VEH include clients’ access to transportation, bureaucratic issues such as paperwork, federal funding cuts, and the challenges of working with veterans who may find it hard to ask for help and/or know how to navigate the services and resources available to them
 - Common strategies for successfully providing services to VEH include hiring staff with lived experience of military service and collaborating with other VEH-serving organizations

- Service providers are strongly united in their recommendations for how San Diego County can reduce, and ultimately eliminate, veteran homelessness, which include:
 - Increase the region’s supply of affordable housing and ensure that there is enough adequate housing for VEH - an approach that can include proactive landlord engagement
 - Continue and expand collaboration among organizations
 - Secure additional funding
 - Promote low-barrier client screening to ensure that all VEH are able to get access to the services and resources they need
 - Provide wrap-around services to meet the holistic needs of each VEH
 - Provide veteran-to-veteran peer mentoring and support

Introduction

This report is part of an ongoing series on homelessness services access in San Diego County, conducted by the Homelessness Hub at UC San Diego with input and support from the Regional Task Force on Homelessness, San Diego's Continuum of Care. This report explores the emergency and temporary housing and services ecosystem for veterans experiencing homelessness (VEH), with a focus on identifying barriers and opportunities in accessing services and housing. The report centers on veterans eligible for benefits based on discharge status, although it is important to note that individuals with less than honorable discharge may have limited or no access to U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) benefits. This is a preliminary report designed to be the first of several projects that focus specifically on VEH in the San Diego region.

The U.S. uniquely identifies veterans as a distinct subgroup among people experiencing homelessness.⁶ In San Diego and across the country, there is strong support from elected officials, policymakers and the public to assist VEH; though this was not always the case. While World War II veterans benefited from widespread public gratitude, Vietnam War veterans returned home to apathy due to the war's unpopularity. This shifted in the 1980s, as attitudes improved and federal policies began to prioritize support for veterans,

particularly those experiencing homelessness.⁷

Following rising rates of VEH after 9/11 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, President Obama made ending veteran homelessness a national priority in 2009.⁸ This led to the expansion of public and nonprofit services, including access to VA healthcare and the HUD-VASH (Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing) Program, which offers rental subsidies and case management through a federal partnership.

In San Diego, VEH benefit from a broad network of federal, state and local services. These efforts contributed to a 60.9% decrease in veteran homelessness between 2012 and 2022. Still, the region has yet to end veteran homelessness. This report draws on multiple sources to assess the current state of emergency and transitional housing and services available to VEH in the San Diego region.

We focus on the following:

- 1) Documenting the history of efforts to address veteran homelessness in San Diego;
- 2) Assembling an inventory and map of organizations in the region that serve veterans and VEH;
- 3) Analyzing data from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the San Diego

Regional Task Force on Homelessness to document trends over time in the status of VEH in San Diego;

- 4) Interviewing a sample of housing and service providers and veterans with histories of homelessness to better understand the issues and challenges in their efforts to address veteran homelessness;
- 5) Reviewing efforts from other regions in the U.S. where instances of veteran homelessness has become rare and brief (referred to as functional zero) to identify strategies that may be of merit to San Diego.

Data Sources and Methods of Analysis

The research team utilized a variety of data and methods of analysis to conduct this exploratory study. The project combined quantitative data analysis with qualitative interviews, archival research, and a literature review which included peer-reviewed scholarship and policy and industry reports. See Appendix I for more detailed information.

Overview of Veteran Homelessness in California and San Diego

The U.S. military has had a large and longstanding presence in California due to the significant role the state has played in national defense since the early 20th century. This has resulted in a consistently large population of active-duty military personnel and veterans in the state. California is home to approximately 30 military installations with a combined total of 157,000 active-duty service members, 52,000 reserve or National Guard members and 1.43 million veterans.⁹ According to American Community Survey estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau, the state's veteran population declined by approximately 30% from 2012 to 2022. This decline may affect trends in veteran

homelessness, though it's unclear whether the reduction stems from national demographic shifts or by veterans relocating outside of California.

Mirroring the state's military legacy, the San Diego region has long played a critical role in national security. The region has the largest concentration of active duty military personnel in the world, with 120,000 people as of 2022.¹⁰ As of 2024, San Diego County was home to approximately 232,000 veterans – the second largest veteran population in California.^{11, 12} Combined with active-duty personnel, military-affiliated individuals make up approximately 35% of the county's total population.¹³

While most California veterans are eligible for numerous benefits and resources, the transition from military life to civilian life can be difficult to navigate and can lead to, among other challenges, housing insecurity and/or homelessness. A recent USC report on veterans in Southern California found that many service members leave the military without adequate housing plans.¹⁴ This lack of preparation significantly increases their risk of homelessness.

As of 2022, more than 50% of the country’s unsheltered veterans live in California,

despite the state accounting for only 8% of the national veteran population.¹⁵ Point-in-Time Count data from 2024 found that California has approximately 9,310 VEH with 9.3% residing in the San Diego region (see Table 1).¹⁶ Overall veteran homelessness has been on the decline. California’s unsheltered veteran population decreased by 41% between 2010 and 2022, but this progress is outpaced by national trends as veteran homelessness nationwide declined by 55% over the same period.¹⁷

Table 1. Active Duty, Veteran, and Unhoused Veteran Counts in San Diego

YEAR	ACTIVE-DUTY	VETERAN	VETERAN HOMELESS
2019	104,357	201,867	1068
2020	112,617	210,611*	940
2021	111,473	183,769	N/A
2022	115,165	181,742	686
2023	111,568	176,043	814
2024	111,027	176,906	865
2025	109,244	N/A	657

Sources: American Community Survey, San Diego Military Economic Impact Report, San Diego Regional Task Force on Homelessness

*Taken from ACS’ 5-year estimate

Between 2018 and 2025, approximately half of VEH in San Diego were age 55+. Black veterans made up a third of the VEH population despite representing about 10% of the state’s overall veteran population during the same time period.¹⁸

Despite these important declines, veterans remain disproportionately represented among the state’s unhoused population. In 2022, veterans comprised approximately 5% of California’s general population, but 7% of the adult population experiencing homelessness. While VEH in California

share similar risk factors with other homeless adults, such as mental illness, substance use disorders, and limited incomes, additional risks, such as higher rates of homelessness for veterans who were dishonorably discharged and therefore ineligible for certain military benefits, are also at play.¹⁹ Beyond individual-level factors, veteran homelessness in California

is influenced by broader structural challenges unique to the region, including high housing costs, tight rental markets, a lack of shelter beds, a large unsheltered population, and a temperate climate that permits year-round street dwelling – all layered over a dense veteran population concentrated in coastal metropolitan areas.²⁰

A Brief History of San Diego Efforts to Address Veteran Homelessness

San Diego has a long and distinctive history of efforts to address veteran homelessness, marked by early local innovation and later alignment with federal policy and funding. Many of the region’s most influential approaches originated through nonprofit, volunteer, and legal responses to visible veteran homelessness. Taken together, these efforts position San Diego as both an early innovator and a testing ground for strategies that were later scaled through federal programs.

Influence of Federal Policies and Programs

Federal policy has played a central role in shaping local responses to veteran homelessness, particularly through a “front door” and “back door” framework.²¹ Front door strategies focus on preventing homelessness through stabilization, homelessness prevention, and rapid rehousing for veterans at risk of losing

housing. Back door strategies prioritize moving VEH into permanent supportive housing. Effective implementation depends on local coordination across housing, healthcare, and social service systems.

The HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program is the primary federal back door intervention. Created in 1992 and expanded in 2008, HUD-VASH pairs rental assistance vouchers with VA case management to support veterans with complex service needs in securing and maintaining permanent housing.²² Complementing this approach, the VA’s Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program supports front door interventions by creating public-private partnerships to deliver homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing services to very low-income veterans and their families.²³ See Appendix II for a timeline of critical federal policies and programs.

In San Diego, these federal efforts have served as tools to support and expand locally driven strategies. The region leverages HUD-VASH as both a housing resource and an organizing framework around which public agencies, service providers, and community partners coordinate outreach, landlord engagement, and service delivery. This interaction between federal policy and local capacity is a defining feature of the region's approach. Federal funding and program structure enabled scale, while local innovation shaped how those resources were deployed in practice.

Early Innovation in Addressing Veteran Homelessness in San Diego²⁴

Prior to the expansion of HUD-VASH, San Diego developed homelessness-specific interventions that addressed the medical, legal, and social barriers facing VEH. Two of the most influential examples, Stand Down and Homeless Court, reflect early recognition that housing stability requires more than shelter alone.

Stand Down, first organized in 1988 by local Vietnam War veterans, was designed as an intensive, low-barrier outreach event providing coordinated access to medical care, legal assistance, benefits enrollment, and basic services.²⁵ Hosted annually by Vietnam Veterans of San Diego (now Veterans Village of San Diego), it is estimated that approximately 30,000 San Diego VEH have been served.²⁶ The event has become a nationally replicated model for engaging VEH through co-located services

and has been identified as among the most impactful VEH outreach practices.²⁷

Homeless Court emerged directly from Stand Down after veterans identified unresolved minor legal offenses as a major barrier to stability.²⁸ First convened in 1989, the program allowed veterans to resolve low-level infractions by demonstrating engagement in services rather than paying fines or serving jail time. Typical infractions include public nuisance offenses such as drinking in public and illegal lodging or offenses stemming from their homelessness such as trespass. Homeless Court's early success led to its expansion and has also inspired other cities to create similar programs (see Appendix III for a more detailed review of early innovations in San Diego).²⁹

Demonstrating Regional Commitment through Local Action

San Diego's response to veteran homelessness reflects a sustained regional commitment, demonstrated through the growth of dedicated organizations and coordinated local initiatives. Beginning in 2001, the region experienced a notable increase in veteran-focused non-profit public charities, which grew in both number and influence. Research from this period highlighted a shared view among these organizations that San Diego's collaborative, cross-sector approach, often referred to as the "San Diego Way," could serve as a national model for addressing veteran needs.³⁰

This commitment has also been expressed through time-bound, results-oriented initiatives. The City of San Diego and the San Diego Housing Commission's *1000 Homeless Veterans Initiative* (2016) successfully housed 1,000 veterans within 18 months, demonstrating the region's ability to rapidly scale HUD-VASH housing placements through coordinated leadership and landlord engagement.³¹ More recently, San Diego County's *Leave No Veterans Homeless Initiative* (2023) has advanced system-level coordination with the goal of achieving functional zero for veteran homelessness, emphasizing outreach, housing placement, and strategies to expand private-market participation in HUD-VASH.³² These efforts underscore the region's long-standing use of locally driven, veteran-specific strategies that complement and extend federal housing and service programs.

Differentiating Veteran Services and Homelessness Responses

San Diego has a broad ecosystem of organizations that serve veterans, including a subset that focuses on veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness. To better understand this landscape, we assembled an inventory of organizations serving VEH, organized into two categories: (1) veteran-serving organizations (VSOs) that primarily serve veterans broadly, but include homelessness prevention or stabilization programming, and (2) veteran homelessness-serving organizations (VHSOs) that focus explicitly on housing assistance and homelessness response for veterans. See Appendix II for full lists of San Diego VSOs and VHSOs.

Trends in Veteran Homelessness Over Time

Point in Time Count (PITC) and Housing Inventory Count (HIC) data from RTFH and HUD were analyzed to examine trends in veteran homelessness in San Diego County over time. HIC data include HUD-VASH voucher allocation (both tenant-choice and project-based) and utilization counts.³³ Voucher allocation data obtained from HUD and voucher utilization data obtained from RTFH were also used for this portion of the analysis.

Although homelessness prevention is recognized as a key strategy for reducing veteran homelessness, there is limited information on the scope or effectiveness of prevention efforts for veterans in San Diego County. Given these limitations, this analysis focuses on interventions that are more directly reflected in available data. We analyzed the number of tenant-choice HUD-VASH vouchers allocated to San Diego County to examine overall trends rather than year-to-year fluctuations. The analysis focuses on how expansions in housing

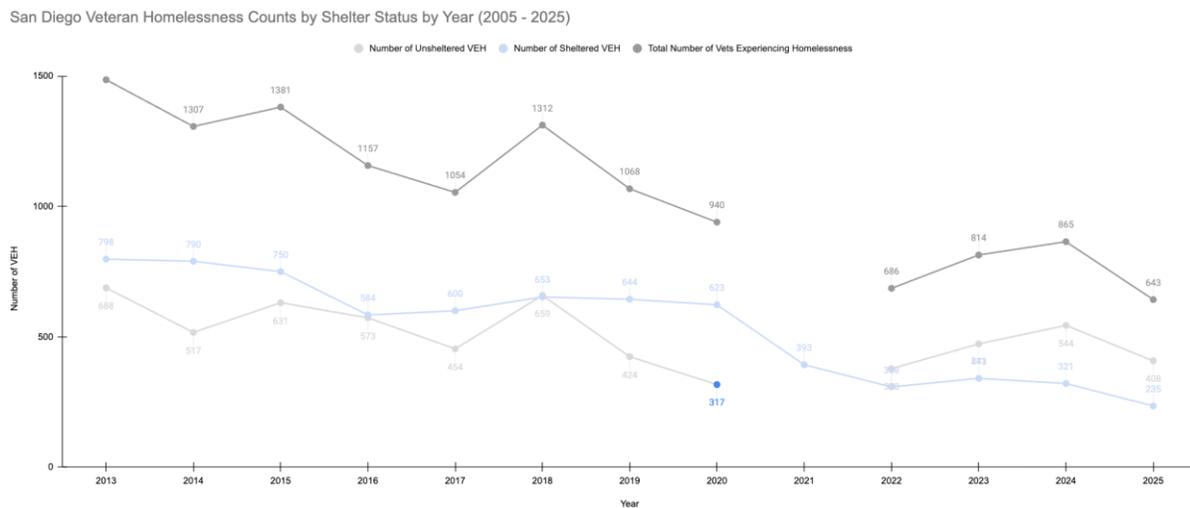
resources correspond with changes in veteran homelessness over time.

Data and Methodological Notes

PITC and HIC data were analyzed from 2013 to 2025 (see Figures 1 and 2). Data limitations included the unavailability of data for certain years.³⁴ Due to inconsistent reporting of project-based HUD-VASH

vouchers, the analysis focuses on tenant-choice HUD-VASH vouchers administered by the San Diego Housing Commission, the Housing Authority of the County of San Diego, and the Oceanside Housing Authority. Tenant-choice vouchers are the dominant method of distributing HUD-VASH resources in San Diego.

Figure 1. San Diego Veteran Homelessness Counts by Shelter Status by Year

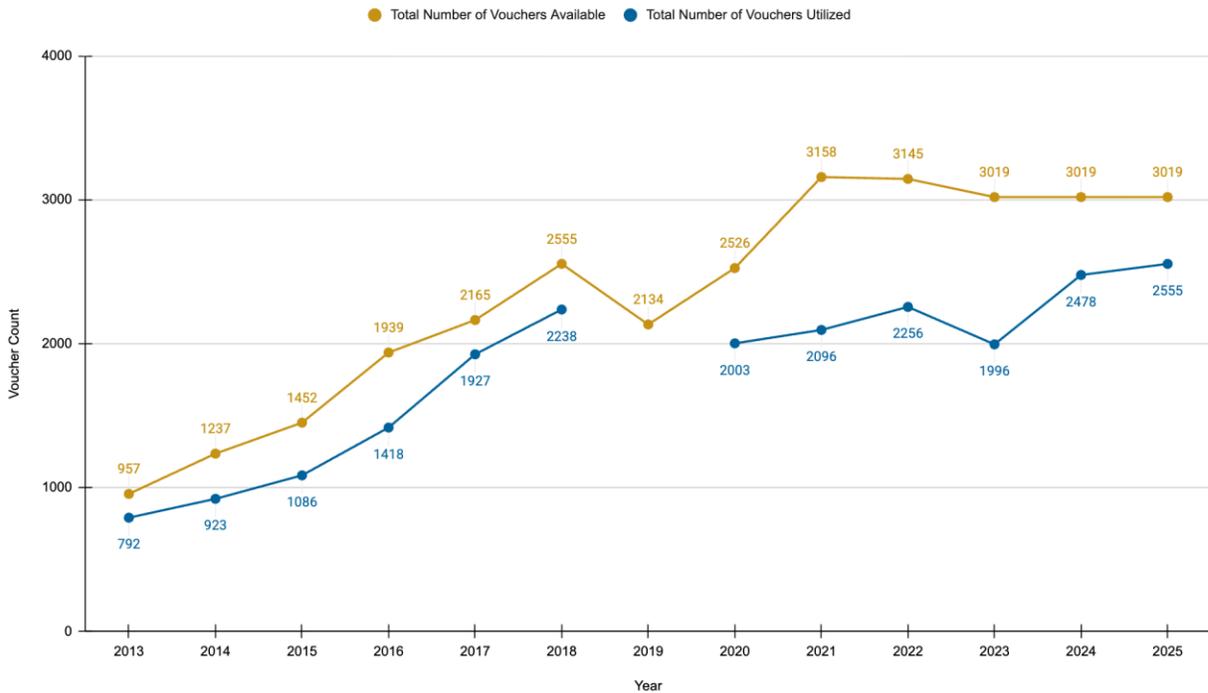


San Diego Veteran Homelessness Counts

Despite annual fluctuations, veteran homelessness in San Diego County has declined substantially over time. From 2013 to 2025, the decline in VEH was 56.7% – outpacing both statewide (28.9%) and national (45.3%) reductions over roughly the same period of time.³⁵

Figure 2. San Diego HUD-VASH Voucher Availability and Utilization Counts by Year

San Diego HUD-VASH Voucher Availability and Utilization Counts By Year (2013-2025)



San Diego HUD-VASH Voucher Trends

Between 2013 and 2025, San Diego County experienced a significant expansion in tenant-choice HUD-VASH vouchers. The number of vouchers increased by approximately 215.5 percent, from 957 to just over 3,000. While voucher utilization rates varied, utilization increased notably between 2023 and 2024. This increase occurred despite the total voucher counts remaining flat.

Understanding the Trends

The PITC and HIC data show an inverse relationship between the number of VEH and the availability and use of tenant-choice HUD-VASH vouchers. Although causal

conclusions cannot be drawn from these data, the steady increase in VASH vouchers from 2013 to 2025 corresponds to the gradual decline in VEH shown in PITC data.³⁶ Major local initiatives such as *Housing Our Heroes*, the introduction of SSVF, and pandemic-era funding increases may have also contributed to this decline. A more detailed analysis is required to better understand these relationships.

Overall, veteran homelessness in San Diego County has declined significantly over the past decade and a half, coinciding with substantial growth in HUD-VASH vouchers and complementary local housing initiatives. At the same time, the supply of options not funded through HUD-VASH (i.e., emergency shelter, transitional housing,

supportive housing, rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing, and other permanent housing) has also increased.³⁷ These local investments, alongside expanded federal and state programming targeting VEH, align with a sustained downward trend in veteran homelessness. Despite periodic fluctuations, the 2025 PITC recorded the lowest count of VEH since 2009.

HUD-VASH Overview

The HUD-VASH program combines HUD’s Housing Choice Voucher rental assistance with VA case management and clinical services, which are provided at VA medical centers, community-based outreach clinics, and through VA contractors.³⁸ Program funding is allocated by Congress annually.³⁹ PHAs self-identify their interest through an

annual Registration of Interest Notice, demonstrate support from their local VA facility, and meet certain utilization threshold requirements to be considered eligible.⁴⁰ After registration has closed, HUD and VA use a formula to determine geographic need, informed by data sources such as PITC and local PHA performance.⁴¹ PHAs are then invited to apply for a specific number of vouchers. Individual voucher funding is determined by the actual average per unit cost at each PHA.⁴²

After vouchers are allocated, veterans are referred to the program and screened for eligibility based on HUD homelessness and income criteria and VA benefit rules.⁴³ Once issued a voucher, veterans must complete a unit search and/or lease-up steps.⁴⁴ Delays often occur due to staff capacity constraints, local housing market constraints, and landlord participation rather than overall voucher availability.⁴⁵

Ongoing Barriers: Lessons from Providers and Veterans

While veteran homelessness has significantly declined in San Diego, it is important to document barriers to accessing housing and supportive services that VEH continue to face in the region. To better understand some of the issues VEH face, we conducted exploratory interviews with seven service providers from a subset of local

organizations that provide services and/or housing to VEH. To supplement this preliminary qualitative work, we conducted a secondary analysis of veteran interviews gathered across various research projects conducted by Homelessness Hub. Across these projects, we coded and analyzed 31 interviews with veterans who were either

actively unhoused or formerly unhoused at the time of the interview. Of these 31 individuals, 30 identified as men and 23 identified as seniors (aged 50+). While 13 individuals identified as White, 11 identified as Black, one identified as Native American, two identified as Asian, and four identified as Hispanic/Latino/a. Only one individual identified as experiencing homelessness within a family unit: with his wife and two children. Although we did not consistently ask about disability, 22 individuals within this sample discussed living with a disability or disabilities. A more detailed discussion of our qualitative methodological approach can be found in Appendix I.

The section below highlights the key themes that emerged from this component of the research. We have organized these themes into barriers all unhoused individuals face in San Diego, including veterans, and barriers specific to VEH.

Barriers All Unhoused Individuals Face (Including Veterans)

Many of the ongoing barriers VEH face with respect to ending their homelessness — including housing barriers, transportation barriers, and bureaucratic barriers — are obstacles all individuals experiencing homelessness face. Nevertheless, they deserve attention here as they are continuously highlighted as challenges to resolving veteran homelessness.

Housing Barriers

Service providers interviewed for this study all agreed that the biggest challenge to reaching functional zero in San Diego, where veteran homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring, is finding adequate housing placements for their clients. Due to the lack of affordable housing in the region, even if a VEH is able to secure a HUD-VASH voucher, interviewees emphasized that there is no guarantee that clients are able to get housed in a timely manner. If the veteran does find an affordable place that suits their needs, the landlord must agree to take the voucher and rent to them. However, individual challenges that VEH may need to address, in addition to strict HUD-VASH and rapid rehousing program requirements, generate lingering obstacles for many VEH. Obstacles of this nature help us understand why HUD-VASH utilization rates are not at 100%.

For example, one provider described the difficulty of securing housing units for their organization's clients because leases are usually 12 months, but this organization's rapid rehousing program only covers the cost of rent for nine months.

Additionally, many of the affordable housing programs available in San Diego appear to focus more on single individuals rather than families, regardless of veteran status. Several providers shared that it is more difficult for VEH families to secure adequate housing. According to one provider, shelters in San Diego do not have adequate accommodations for families and tenant-choice vouchers primarily serve singles or couples. Similarly, another

provider noted that the amount of time it takes to house a family with a HUD-VASH voucher is significantly longer than for an individual, and that project-based vouchers are severely limited for veterans with families.

Without adequate housing, it will be difficult to increase the number of outflow, or clients exiting homelessness into permanent housing. Likewise, as rents continue to increase in San Diego, the inflow, or the number of people entering homelessness, is also rising. As one provider explained:

To [end veteran homelessness], you would need to have enough housing available to meet the needs of the community. And so I think at this point, it's been a challenge because we've had a lot of people that are entering first time homeless[ness]. And so that kind of speaks more to a larger community issue where, is our housing in our community accessible by a fair portion of folks in the community, so I think for functional zero to work, you would need to address that, whether you're trying to create some space for that, but that requires more than an SSVF program or a VA, it requires our communities to do some planning because we do have a housing shortage.

The need for more housing ties into the need for more landlord engagement. According to another provider, dedicated landlord engagement is needed to educate landlords

on the benefits associated with accepting a HUD-VASH voucher and to reduce stigma associated with renting to a VEH.

Transportation Barriers

Transportation is a frequent challenge for clients, inhibiting their ability to access services from different organizations. Many essential services are not within walking distance, forcing individuals to choose between paying for transportation and meeting basic needs, which can in turn negatively impact health outcomes and create more instability. One service provider noted that their organization serves many individuals who suffer from mental health issues, mobility issues, and/or individuals who are on house arrest. These clients cannot access services on their own and often must rely on public transportation. In our secondary analysis, of the 11 veterans currently experiencing homelessness, only two had their own vehicles.

Beyond the tradeoff between paying for transportation and other basic needs is the reality of lengthy wait times when using public transit. As Gerry, a White veteran in his 50s, told us:

It seems like I have two vet appointments a week and you know for me one appointment can take up a whole day just because I've gotta take public transportation. So it's not as easy for me to get around and get things done like I want to.

While this reality was getting in the way of Gerry's desire to engage in volunteerism, as

his homelessness was behind him, many VEH who must rely on public transit find lengthy commutes even more of a drain on their energy, which is already overexerted as individuals must deal with the daily challenges of meeting their basic needs. Service providers we interviewed additionally acknowledged that transportation becomes a greater barrier when unhoused individuals have to travel to public libraries to access technology to apply for services they need or to referred organizations throughout the county.

Bureaucratic Barriers

Navigating bureaucratic processes, including paperwork such as applications, is another common challenge for clients. Several providers shared that their organization's application processes can be lengthy since they frequently include information about client rights, program limitations, and the legalities of the program - which can be difficult for individuals to understand without the help of a case manager. Service providers also acknowledged that the type of questions that appear in the screening and application processes may be “off-putting” to clients, including asking about mental health and histories of substance use, especially for those with veteran status.

Overtaxed case managers and constant staff turnover make the navigation of bureaucracy even more challenging. Alvin, a 47-year-old Native American veteran told us how he went to the VA and met a case manager, but she never contacted him again. While he later found out she had quit, no one ever

followed up to tell him and to provide him with a new case manager.

Legal Barriers

A predominant theme across our veteran interviews was the legal repercussions of being unhoused. Mark, a 65-year-old White veteran, recounted his multiple citations for sleeping in his RV prior to moving into a safe parking program. Taz, a 49-year-old Latino veteran, discussed his ongoing issues with the police who frequently show up at his encampment. Not only has this constant interaction with law enforcement landed him on probation, but he now has an open warrant out due to his failure to show up in court, a problem he blamed on the police:

Where I'm staying at, the police ...they got a thing against me. I don't know what it is. Basically just one cop. He does not like me. I had just got out of the hospital and all my stuff was at the park. They came through, they took everything of mine. My crutches. My walker. My medicine. My ID. They got everything and threw it in the back of a garbage truck...so I didn't know when my court date was... That's when I got the warrant.

While citations can lead to expensive fees that are difficult for unhoused individuals to pay, ongoing police interaction can also lead to records that only further entrench individuals in their housing precarity. In the instance of Taz, an open warrant will make it difficult for him to obtain housing.

Funding Barriers

Funding is a critical issue that has impacted almost every service provider we interviewed. Federally funded organizations reported large program cuts, in light of the current administration, which have affected staffing and outreach efforts. These organizations also worry about future reductions such as grant caps on administrative spending which impact investments in staff support and retention. Preventing staff burnout is necessary to maintain positive outcomes with unhoused clients. Additionally, several service providers noted that some funding is narrowly restricted in how it can be used. Funding limitations also contribute to underpaid staff, particularly those in specialized roles, and shifts the goal of the employee towards meeting baseline program goals rather than providing meaningful and individualized client care.

These funding limitations exacerbate many of the barriers listed above. Without adequate resources, organizations may not be able to provide transportation support for clients or maintain the staff necessary to assist clients in navigating bureaucratic processes. Ending veteran homelessness is a major accomplishment and outcomes can vary based on the capabilities of the staff and providers involved. In communities that have achieved functional zero there is evidence to suggest that hiring dedicated staff members for specific roles such as landlord engagement and housing outreach result in less burnout and better client outcomes. In some communities that have achieved functional zero, local providers

employ intentional case management, focusing on the client's specific needs (instead of employing a one-size-fits-all approach) to end their experience of homelessness (see Appendix IV for more details). Given the success in these CoCs, funding for such staff is crucial.

Reductions in funding directly impact organizations' capacity to support VEH. Despite these challenges, organizations continue to adapt and advocate for their clients' well-being and work towards long-term stability.

Veteran-Specific Barriers

While many of the barriers discussed by service providers and veterans affect all individuals experiencing homelessness, some are specific to veterans. These include the hesitancy many veterans have in asking for help, the challenges that can arise around discharge status, and the lack of subpopulation assistance for veterans with intersectional identities.

Military Ethos

Many service providers shared that the experience of serving in the military and transitioning to civilian life presents a unique set of challenges for veterans. A significant barrier that makes it difficult for veterans to access services is the act of asking for help. According to one service provider, the military imparts a "military ethos" upon veterans where they feel they must be dependable and self-reliant. After service members are discharged and have to reintegrate into civilian society, some of

them experience housing and mental health instability and do not feel comfortable seeking help. Some service providers mentioned that in order to help the larger veteran population, the veterans themselves must be willing to accept the help first.

Because some veterans are hesitant to ask for help, they do not know where to go for assistance. While this is true once veterans become unhoused, this is additionally true when veterans are in danger of losing their housing. This was apparent across our veteran interviews, where an economic shock such as a job loss or a mental health issue propelled individuals into homelessness. Additionally, all of the veterans we interviewed were unaware that they qualified for veteran-specific prevention initiatives. Six individuals in our sample did not know they qualified for HUD-VASH until our team told them so.

As discomfort with seeking help perpetuates instability, it is critical to understand veterans' perceptions. In the words of one service provider, who was also a veteran,

“I think that that's one thing that all veterans need to understand. They don't have to do it alone. We had to do it alone in uniform, but we don't have to do it alone now.”

Discharge Status and Service Length

In addition to a reluctance to ask for help, many veterans feel a sense of shame about

their discharge status or service length. Despite a recent expansion of HUD-VASH eligibility in 2021, many programs do not accept veterans with Dishonorable Discharge status or those with Bad Conduct Discharge from a general court-martial. As such, those veterans may avoid seeking services altogether. Beyond discharge status, many veterans who have served for less than two years are ineligible for HUD-VASH (unless they were injured during their service, leading to early discharge).

These barriers were discussed in our interviews with veterans. Justin, a 55-year-old White veteran, is unable to qualify for HUD-VASH given the fact that he only served for one year and 10 months. With his limited income from disability, he cannot afford to rehouse in San Diego on his own. Haley, a 37-year-old Latina veteran, only served 10 months before her bipolar disorder and anxiety resulted in a medical discharge. Upon leaving the service, Haley began to self-medicate with cocaine. This combination of mental health and substance use issues made it difficult for Haley to stay employed and housed. Unable to qualify for HUD-VASH and unable to afford private market housing or to navigate the limited supply of housing assistance for people experiencing homelessness in San Diego, both Justin and Haley are still unhoused. While Justin currently resides in a harm-reduction shelter, Haley is unsheltered, living out of her vehicle.

It should also be noted that although the HUD-VASH eligibility criteria was expanded to veterans with OTH discharge

statuses in 2021,⁴⁶ most of the organizations interviewed for this study exclude veterans with an OTH status thereby limiting their access to necessary homelessness services.

A Lack of Subpopulation Assistance

Across the homelessness services ecosystem, the lack of resources for specific subpopulations of VEH also presents challenges. One service provider noted the lack of programs specifically targeted towards low-income women veterans. This

is a critical need since women veterans are a growing subsection of at-risk and unhoused veterans who often have unique needs such as recovering from gender-based violence.⁴⁷ Two other providers noted that elderly veterans require increased attention with respect to services and housing due to struggles associated with aging. This finding was further validated by veteran interviews. As Kevin, a 67-year-old White veteran told us, “I’ve got a lot of health issues. I’ve had COPD. I’ve had congestive heart failure. And I’ve had three strokes in the last four or five years.”

Conclusion: Best Practices, Data Recommendations, and Future Trajectories

This exploratory investigation into veteran homelessness in San Diego generates several recommendations related to housing and service provision, data collection, and future research trajectories. Many of these recommendations are also informed by the strategies that other CoCs in the US have employed to achieve functional zero. Since each region has its own unique challenges and existing infrastructure, it is important to acknowledge that what was successful in one region will not necessarily work in another. Nonetheless, many of the lessons are still relevant to San Diego.^{48,49}

Best Service Practices

Based on interviews with providers and veterans and a review of the initiatives used

by CoCs that have achieved functional zero, below are practices to help address ongoing barriers VEH face. **Best Practices for the Entire Homelessness Ecosystem**

1. Housing

As learned from CoCs that have achieved functional zero and from local efforts in San Diego, proactive landlord outreach is necessary for securing and maintaining housing placements for veterans. Communities that have achieved functional zero have found creative approaches to appeal to landlords who are hesitant to rent to unhoused individuals. Such tactics include sending photos of prospective veteran tenants and introducing landlords to housing coordinators and case managers so

that landlords are assured their veteran residents will be well supported (see Appendix IV for more details). In the San Diego region, the City of San Diego and the San Diego Housing Commission's *1000 Homeless Veterans Initiative* and the County's *Leave No Veterans Homeless Initiative* demonstrate the power of landlord engagement for improving housing outcomes for VEH.

Several communities that have achieved functional zero use a By-Name-List (BNL) to keep track of VEH until they secure permanent housing. An accurate, accessible, and quality BNL that is constantly updated can help to ensure that all homeless veterans are identified and tracked in a given region until they are permanently housed. Adding to the success of the BNL is progressive case management, where veterans are comprehensively assisted with their personal needs until they are housed. One service provider interviewed for this study expressed support for this approach "In order to drive something to functional zero, you're going to have to do a triage, get people to the right pathway based on their particular situation then you're going to have to track that individual to ensure that they're getting the right services to meet their needs in order to get them out of homelessness."

A focus on prevention methods is equally important. Providing adequate military transition support to service members before they are discharged is one way to address this. One provider, a veteran himself, noted that the military is good at "assimilating people into the military...the problem is

they're not as good at transitioning people out of the military." Most veterans, when they leave the military, are left to fend for themselves with no plan, and no knowledge of the benefits and programs they can access. Another provider, who was also a veteran, shared that he saw his fellow service members fall into homelessness upon discharge. As such, he recommended incorporating curriculum on homelessness and benefits resources into classes such as the Navy's Transition Assistance Program (TAP), so service members can get assistance creating transition plans and learn about resources available to avoid the experience of homelessness.

2. Transportation

In response to the transportation challenges faced by VEH, providers interviewed for this study discussed how their organizations utilize company vehicles to meet clients in the field or at their homes or to drive them to appointments. Providers also discussed how their organizations offer bus/trolley passes and distribute gas cards to assist VEH.

3. Bureaucracy

Many of the service providers interviewed for this study discussed solutions their organizations have developed to address concerns around convoluted applications. One provider described the way that their organization assigns intake staff members to help clients with paperwork, even going to their place of residence if they do not have access to transportation. Another provider described the ways in which their

organization worked to streamline its application processes, including making intake forms shorter.

Not only are the length of intake forms important, but so too are their content. Since veterans as a group have high rates of physical and mental health conditions, asking about these conditions in order to access non-health related resources can be “off-putting.” One service provider shared that her organization waits until it has established a relationship with its clients before discussing mental health conditions: “Whenever you're dealing with those who might be going through any type of mental health concern, but if you always approach them with a fact that you feel that way, or, like, that's the first question you ask, it does become off-putting. So, even within our screening process, that's not a question that we ask. We hope that we're having a genuine conversation.”

Service providers interviewed for this study also highlighted the bureaucratic challenges that arise when VEH must rely on multiple organizations for assistance. To combat these challenges in San Diego, organizations are making their applications easier to review and process. Many are also turning to online paperwork to make it easier to share client information across agencies working collaboratively. For example, one service provider discussed the adoption of a universal application for housing vouchers so that if a client applies to one PHA and changes their mind, the PHA can send the application to other PHAs instead of having the client fill out a new application. One

provider noted that these efforts have helped to streamline the HUD-VASH process for housing authorities and landlords.

4. Legal Practices

Homeless Court was identified as a useful resource by several veterans interviewed for this study. As previously discussed, Homeless Court provides unhoused individuals with an opportunity to remedy infractions and low-level misdemeanors. A recent innovation brings Homeless Court out to the public on a regular basis, setting up in parks known to have high levels of unsheltered homelessness. The intention of this new approach is to engage individuals who eschew homelessness services due to their legal troubles.

5. Funding Practices

More funding and/or more flexible funding structures are desired by service providers. Due to the large scale of veteran homelessness in San Diego, one service provider shared that it is “easy to overspend” their organization’s funding. Many of the service providers interviewed for this study work for organizations that receive federal funding. In light of the current administration, federally funded organizations and programs are concerned about future budget cuts and diminished allocation of critical resources . One service provider described changes that she has been noticing within the region, including the closing of the County Community Care Coordination for Veterans (C3V) program, which had shown success in reducing

recidivism and homelessness rates among justice-impacted veterans.

Promising Practices to Address Veteran-Specific Barriers

1. Military Ethos

Jurisdictions that have succeeded in reaching functional zero understand that veterans have a hard time seeking help or have trust issues with local and federal agencies such as the VA. As such, many CoCs have altered outreach approaches. For instance, it is important to have staff members with lived experience of military service in organizations serving VEH to fully understand the experience that unhoused veterans are going through. . One provider interviewed for this study, who also had significant military experience, opined that organizations that serve veterans need to have “a veteran in the space” to gain “an understanding of the veteran” to know how to best support them. When asked about how to engage with veterans who do not want to access homelessness services, one service provider recommended incorporating veteran-to-veteran engagement into Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) or Psychiatric Emergency Response Team (PERT) models, where “you have a veteran representative and if you're engaging folks on the street and you're able to provide that one-on-one... it's encouraging the veteran to be willing to ask for help, which is not always an easy thing to do.”

Another way that service providers have succeeded in addressing the unique needs of VEH is through fostering a strong sense of community. One provider discussed how veterans often experience a strong sense of camaraderie and teamwork in the military and therefore after discharge they may feel unstable and alone. One of the ways that this service provider addresses this is by encouraging its alumni to stay engaged with the organization through alumni meetups. This sense of belonging encourages better outcomes in the long term as peer support motivates veterans to ask for help and maintain their progress.

2. Discharge Status and Service Length

Due to the stigma around military release, some service providers interviewed for this study described the ways in which their organizations have simplified applications to avoid leading with questions about discharge status. This makes veterans with disqualifying discharge statuses feel more willing to apply to services since discharge status is not an immediate consideration.

Jurisdictions that have achieved functional zero also prioritize housing placements for VEH, regardless of eligibility for specific programs. This includes setting aside housing vouchers and/or prioritizing VEH for specific programs. It also includes leveraging funding to use for VEH who are ineligible for VA funding or cannot attain HUD-VASH vouchers.

3. Intersectional Identities

Although none of our interviewees brought up how to effectively address intersectional challenges among VEH, there is research that provides a blueprint for how to begin.⁵⁰ In terms of older veterans, research suggests the benefits of interventions that reduce social isolation for this population as reductions in isolation lead to improved mental health.⁵¹ With respect to women, outreach efforts should be tailored to assist women veterans experiencing homelessness with their unique social and medical needs.⁵²

Data Recommendations

Based on our analysis of HUD-VASH utilization, we recommend the following improvements to current data collection efforts.

1. Consistency in Data Collection Across Public Housing Agencies

We were unable to conduct an analysis of project-based voucher utilization rates due to inconsistencies in reporting across the PHAs within the San Diego region. As such, we recommend that PHAs consistently collect data on PBV use so that accurate comparisons can be made across agencies and an accurate picture of regional use is easier to accomplish.

Future Research Projects

This preliminary investigation into veteran homelessness in the San Diego region has

led to the identification of three new research projects that Homelessness Hub plans to pursue based on gaps in local knowledge.

1. The Effectiveness of Prevention Methods

Although prevention efforts are part of the VA's plan to end veteran homelessness, the San Diego region does not have readily available data about the effectiveness of local prevention efforts. Additionally, prevention was not addressed during the interview phase of this research project. This is a significant gap in our knowledge as prevention initiatives would not only stop veterans from experiencing the traumas associated with homelessness but would additionally reduce homelessness expenditures significantly (as well as legal and medical expenditures associated with homelessness). As such, it is important that we map and evaluate veteran homelessness prevention efforts in San Diego's CoC.

2. Understanding Intersectional Identities Among Veterans

While some of the veterans interviewed for this study who identified as Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC) discussed their experiences of racism, these were never connected to racist interactions within homelessness services or veteran-specific organizations. This finding is, likely, due to the fact that we relied on a secondary analysis of data collected for

other projects, where the aim of these projects was never to understand the intersectional experiences of unhoused or formerly unhoused veterans. More research should be conducted that specifically interrogates the experiences of BIPOC veterans as well as veterans who identify as LGBTQIA+, those living with disabilities, women, and older veterans. Knowing that veterans' experiences are shaped by their other identities — and that service providers interviewed for this project highlighted the specific needs of women veterans and older veterans in San Diego — further research is needed on intersectional veteran experiences in the San Diego CoC.

3. Housing First, But What Comes Second?

Even though HUD-VASH has successfully ended the homelessness of many of the

veterans interviewed by Homelessness Hub, many of the veterans we interviewed nonetheless spoke about ongoing challenges with mental health and social isolation. More research is needed to understand how the San Diego region can help formerly unhoused veterans thrive in their housing environments and how tenant-choice voucher and project-based voucher holders differ in their experiences, specifically with respect to access to case management and social ties. Many veterans interviewed by Homelessness Hub who use PBV noted the importance of having on-site case management. They also spoke about the importance of having veteran neighbors who have become invaluable connections within their social networks. Homelessness Hub will study the extent to which PBV housing is particularly effective for formerly unhoused veterans, especially certain subpopulations including older veterans and veterans with disabilities.

Appendix I - Methods

Interviews with Service Providers

The research team conducted a series of interviews with staff members from a subset of organizations in the San Diego region's veteran homelessness ecosystem to better understand their work, the populations they serve, the challenges they face, and the areas where they have documented positive results. Prior to conducting these stakeholder interviews, the research team convened a small focus group that included individuals with lived experience of homelessness and military service and an individual with lived experience of homelessness who was raised in a military family. The focus group shared insights on their own experiences navigating the homelessness housing and services ecosystem and provided input on the questions we ultimately included in the stakeholder interview guide. While we did not have the opportunity to interview representatives from all the organizations in the region that serve VEH, this preliminary phase of stakeholder interviews nonetheless functions as a useful foundation for future studies.

Seven organizations were queried. The names of the organizations and individuals queried have been anonymized due to the small sample size.

Through the interviews with service providers, the research team sought to better understand the following topics from the service providers' perspectives: 1) the barriers and/or gaps within the homelessness

services ecosystem that exist for VEH, 2) the strategies and/or interventions that have been successful in addressing veteran homelessness, 3) barriers the region is facing regarding reaching functional zero for veteran homelessness, and 4) identification of changes and/or improvements to the VEH-serving system that can help the region achieve functional zero. As discussed below, among these topics there are areas of overlap. For example, some of the barriers to providing services to VEH have led to effective problem-solving resulting in successful outcomes. Even though only a subset of service providers was interviewed, the collective responses are nonetheless informative and serve as a useful foundation for future research.

As a component of the discussion on solutions, interviewees were asked to provide suggestions on what San Diego could do to achieve functional zero. Functional zero is a data-driven, systems-focused approach adopted by some communities to achieve a steady-state where homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.⁵³ It is an aspirational goal that is used to influence policy and funding decisions on homelessness.

Secondary Analysis of Veteran Interviews

To supplement interviews with service providers, the research team conducted a secondary analysis of interviews previously

conducted with veterans during other Homelessness Hub research projects. A secondary analysis allows researchers to reassess data collected for other studies with a new focus: in this case, on the lingering barriers VEH face despite the success of HUD-VASH in San Diego. The research team analyzed 31 interviews previously conducted with veterans as part of the following projects: an analysis of the Jewish Family Services of San Diego Safe Parking Program; an evaluation of Humble Design San Diego; research into single-room-occupancy housing, and an investigation into homelessness services in North County. After identifying all interviewees from these projects who identified as veterans, the research team re-coded and analyzed transcripts, audio recordings, and notes to identify barriers encountered by VEH.

Analysis of Point-in-Time Count Data and HUD-VASH Voucher Data

To examine the relationship between changes in veteran homelessness and housing interventions over time, the research team analyzed Annual Point-in-Time Count (PITC) data⁵⁴ from HUD and RTFH for the period of 2013 to 2025. HUD-VASH

voucher allocation data from HUD and voucher utilization data from RTFH were analyzed for 2013 to 2024 to assess trends in tenant-choice voucher availability and use. Due to inconsistencies in reporting of project-based vouchers, the voucher analysis focuses on tenant-choice HUD-VASH vouchers administered by the San Diego Housing Commission, the Housing Authority of the County of San Diego, and the Oceanside Housing Authority.

Other Data Sources

The research team also assembled a veteran homeless services inventory and an accompanying map of the location of these organizations. The team used 2-1-1 data in combination with an internet search to produce this list.

The research team also conducted a review of academic peer-reviewed publications, policy reports and other studies and documents that address veteran homelessness broadly and in San Diego in particular. This enabled the research team to better understand the historical timeline of the region's responses to veteran homelessness.

Appendix II - Programs, Policies, and Organizations that Support Veterans and Veterans Experiencing Homelessness

Significant policy changes often follow wars, as veteran homelessness tends to become more visible.⁵⁵ After the Vietnam War, many veterans returned to an unwelcoming country due to the unpopularity of the war. It took decades for public perceptions to shift, eventually shaping federal responses to veteran homelessness after the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.⁵⁶

In 2009, Barack Obama prioritized ending veteran homelessness. The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness launched *Opening Doors*, the first federal strategic plan to

prevent and end veteran homelessness. It employed a Housing First approach, prioritizing rapid rehousing and the use of HUD-VASH vouchers. This informed the VA's five-year plan to end veteran homelessness by 2015, which focused on prevention, rapid rehousing and support services. These efforts led to a 49% reduction in veteran homelessness for the time period of 2010-2020.⁵⁷

The figures below (see Figure IIA and Figure IIB) outline key local and federal policies that have shaped efforts to address veteran homelessness over time.

Figure IIA. A History of Federal Policies and Programs to Assist Veterans

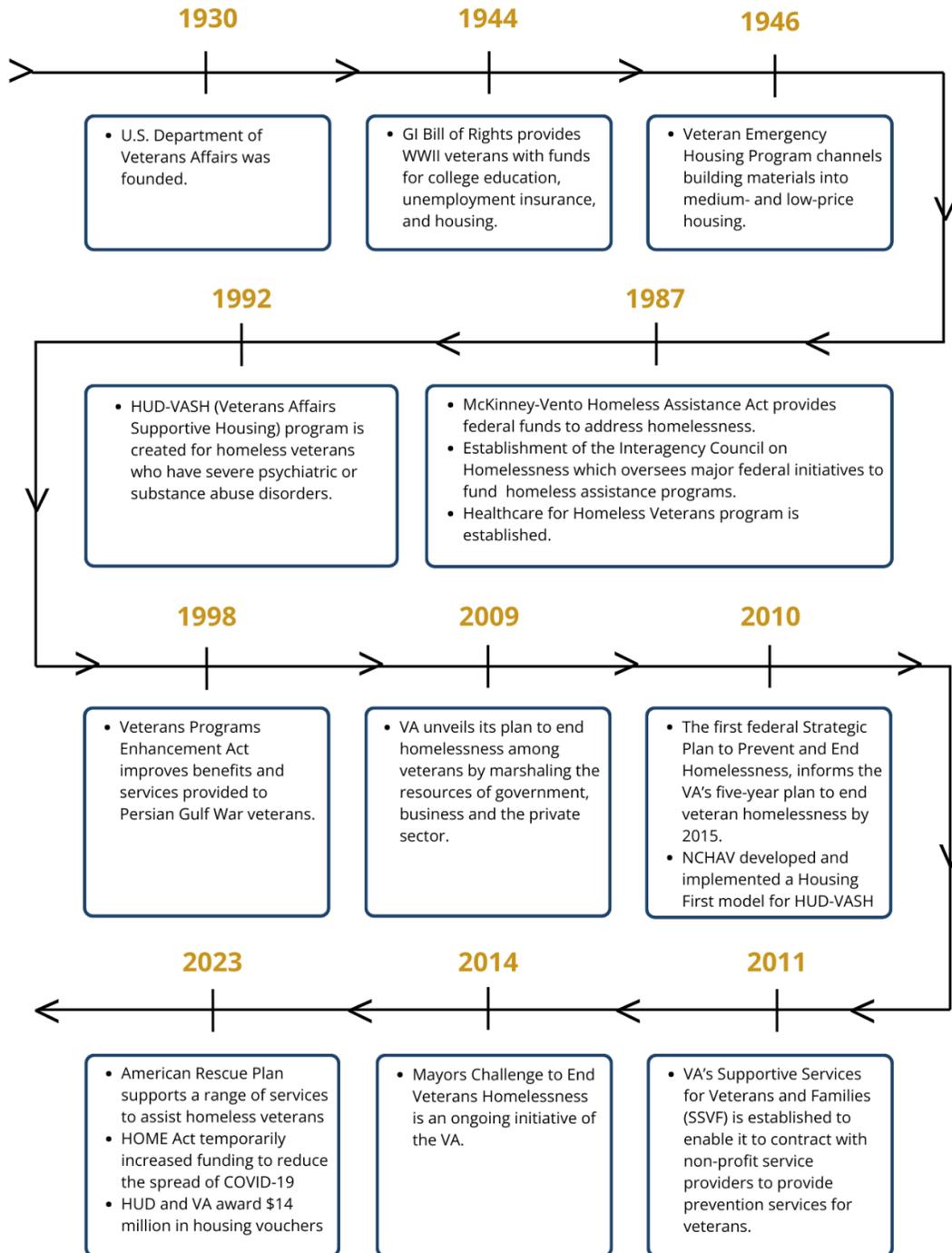
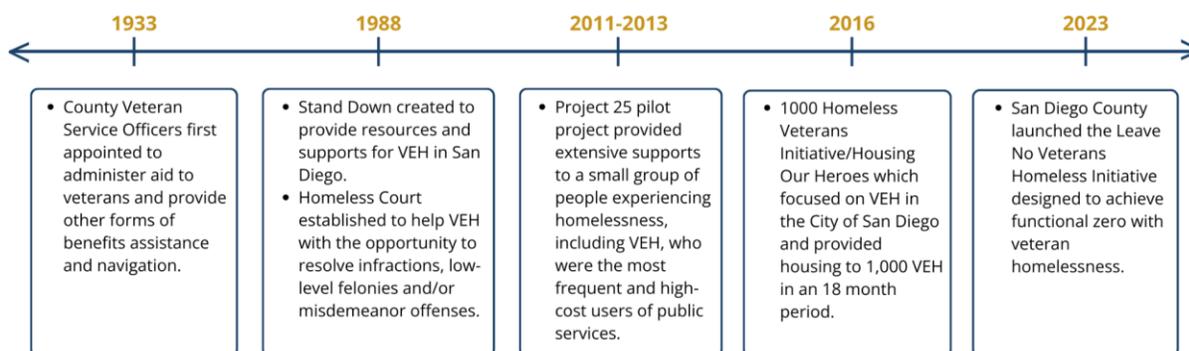


Figure IIB. A Timeline of San Diego Initiatives to Assist Veterans



Ecosystem of Organizations that Serve Veterans Experiencing Homelessness

San Diego has a broad ecosystem of organizations that serve veterans, including a subset that focuses specifically on veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness. To better understand the landscape, we assembled an inventory of organizations serving VEH, organized into two categories: 1) veteran-serving organizations (VSO) that serve the broader veteran community, but also include homelessness prevention or stabilization, and 2) veteran homelessness serving organizations (VHSO) that provide housing support, direct housing assistance, or initiatives specifically for homeless or at-risk veterans.

Veteran-Serving Organizations

Our research identified 24 veteran-serving nonprofit organizations operating in San Diego County. These organizations provide services such as benefits navigation, mental health and wellness support, legal assistance, employment and vocational training, and *also* include homelessness

prevention programming for at-risk veterans and transitioning service members. Many are local chapters of national or state organizations, while others are locally based nonprofits serving specific veteran subpopulations, such as women veterans or veterans in recovery. Several organizations that initially served veterans broadly have expanded overtime to include homelessness prevention or housing-related services, underscoring overlap between the two categories. A full list and geographic distribution of these organizations is provided in Table IIA Table IIB and Figure IIC.

San Diego County also hosts two higher education institutions with a Vet Success on Campus (VSOC) program: San Diego State University and Mira Costa College. VSOCs are a program designed and supported by the US Department of Veteran Affairs and provide assistance to veterans, servicemembers and their dependents with

the transition to higher education. While most of these organizations serve veterans throughout San Diego County, several limit their catchment area to a subset of the region.⁵⁸

Homelessness, which provides regional leadership and coordination on ending veteran homelessness.

Veteran Homelessness Serving Organizations

In addition to the organizations, San Diego also has a robust infrastructure of 15 public and nonprofit organizations with programs focused specifically on veterans at-risk of or experiencing homelessness. This includes federal and county agencies, such as the VA and the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency, which administer key housing and service programs for VEH. A full list and geographic distribution of these organizations is provided in Figures 3 and 4.

The region has six public housing agencies that administer federally-funded housing programs, three of which – Housing Authority of the County of San Diego, City of San Diego Housing Commission and Oceanside City Housing Authority – administer HUD-VASH vouchers. San Diego is also served by three Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) authorized organizations: Adjoin, PATH and Veterans Village of San Diego.⁵⁹ These organizations deliver VA-funded trauma-informed case management, homelessness prevention, and rapid rehousing to veterans at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Regional coordination is supported through the Veteran’s Consortium, a standing committee of the Regional Task Force on

Table IIA. San Diego County Veteran-Serving Organizations (VSO)

Organization Name	Website Link	Organization Type	Services Provided
Brother Benno's Foundation	https://brotherbenno.org	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Basic Needs, Outreach, Recovery Support
CA Veterans Legal Task Force	http://www.cvltf.org	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Educational Outreach, Legal Assistance
Courage to Call	https://www.courage2call.org	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Mental Health Support, Service Referrals
EasterSeals Veterans Employment & Transition Services	https://esscblog.com/programs/bob-hope-veterans-support-program/introducing-veterans-employment-transition-services-vets	501(c)(3) Non-profit Program	Employment Support, Military Transition Support
Foundation for Women Warriors	https://foundationforwomenwarriors.org/programs	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Financial Assistance, Peer Support, Service Referrals
Goodwill Industries of San Diego County	https://sdgoodwill.org	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Basic Needs, Employment Support, Family Support, Military Transition Support
Heartland House	https://heartlandhouse.org	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Case Management, Mental Health Support, Residential Treatment, Sober Living, Transportation
Mira Costa	https://www.miracosta.edu/student-services/veterans-services/index.html	Public Non-profit Community College	Counseling, Employment Support, Military Transition Support, Service Referrals
Navy SEAL Foundation	https://www.navysealfoundation.org/	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Career Transition, Family Support, Financial Assistance, Service Referrals
Operation Homefront, Inc.	https://operationhomefront.org/our-programs	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Family Support, Financial Assistance, Housing
Reboot	https://www.nvtisi.org/	501(c)(3) Non-profit Program	Employment Support
Red Cross Service to the Armed Forces (SAF) / American Red Cross	https://www.redcross.org/local/california/southern-california/about-us/our-work/service-to-the-armed-forces.html?srsltid=AfmBOopsi_dyYhVjEx2u8tL431H_RndcT6VbMCSPqDLTzGr4bpQThH5	Healthcare Nonprofit	Benefits Advocacy, Financial Assistance, Healthcare, Mental Health Support, Service Referrals
SDSU	https://sacd.sdsu.edu/veterans	California State University, Nonprofit	Employment Support, Service Referrals
Semper Fi Fund	https://semperfifund.org/	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Adaptive Equipment, Family Support, Financial Assistance, Military Transition Support, Wellness Programs
USO San Diego	https://california.uso.org/programs	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Military Transition Support
VANC (Veterans Association of North County)	https://www.vanc.me	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Employment Support, Family Support, Military Transition Support

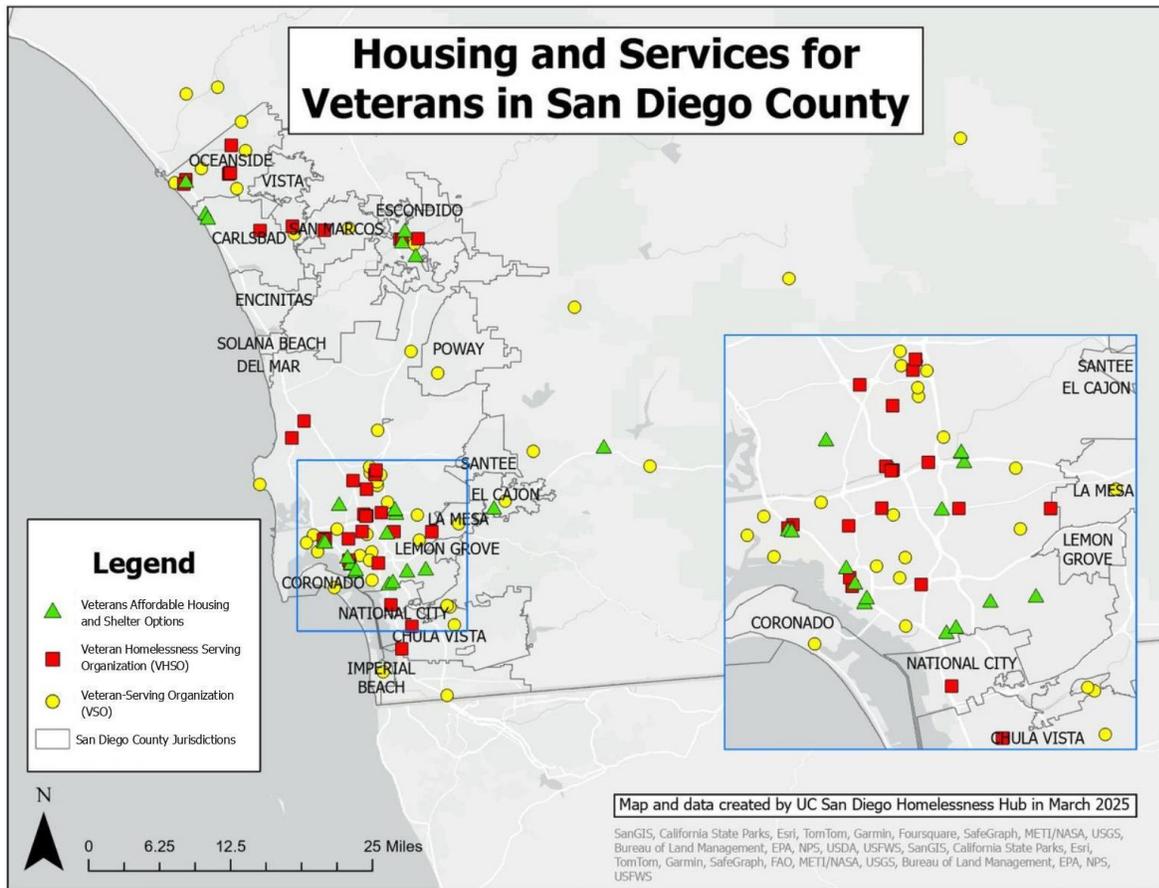
Veterans Navigation Center	https://veteransnavigationcenter.org	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Case Management, Service Referrals
Veterans of Foreign Wars	https://www.vfw.org/Assistance/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=1818258463&gclid=CjwKCAjw7_DEBhAeEiwAWKiCC-QStHbzXss02kfdnmZVlhzzst2HrCj3Y2-hv8wi2Ssnwor8ssF9iLhoCwwwQAvD_BwE	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Benefits Advocacy, Financial Assistance, Mental Health Support
VETS-Beyond the Uniform	https://vetsbeyondtheuniform.com	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Employment Support
Vietnam Veterans of America	https://vva.org	503(c)(3) Nonprofit	Benefits Advocacy, Employment Support, Financial Education, Outreach, Service Referrals
Warrior Foundation Freedom Station	https://warriorfoundation.org	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Adaptive Equipment, Employment Support, Family Support, Housing, Mentorship Program, Service Referrals, Sports Therapy
Workshops for Warriors	https://wfw.org/programs	501(c)(3) Non-profit School	Vocational Training
Wounded Warrior Project	https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/programs?gclid=aw.ds&gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=1755672625&gclid=CjwKCAjw7_DEBhAeEiwAWKiCCy8aAYpyvqTck2NcVlyPzAeRmrfvYcrfHzgOoB4otFoiMS_FCKAMhoCk5oQAvD_BwE	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Benefits Advocacy, Employment Support, Family Support, Financial Education, Mental Health Support, Peer Support, Service Referrals
Zero8Hundred	https://www.zero8hundred.org	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Military Transition Support, Peer Support

Table IIB. San Diego County Veteran Homelessness Serving Organizations (VHSO)

Organization Name	Website Link	Organization Type	Services Provided
Able-Disabled Advocacy	https://www.able2work.org/	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Employment Support, Service Referrals
Adjoin	https://adjoin.org/	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Case Management, Employment Support, Financial Assistance, Service Referrals
Alpha Project for the Homeless	https://alphaproject.org/	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Employment Support, Housing, Mental Health Support, Outreach, Residential Treatment, Transportation
American Legion	https://www.legion.org/	Non-profit VSO	Benefits Advocacy, Employment Support, Financial Assistance, Mental Health Support, Outreach, Service Referrals
County of San Diego HHSA	https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa.html	Government Agency	Case Management, Employment Support, Outreach, Service Referrals

Disabled American Veterans	https://davpickupservice.org/	501(c)(4) Nonprofit	Benefits Advocacy, Employment Support, Military Transition Support, Transportation
Father Joe's Village	https://my.neighbor.org/	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Basic Needs, Case Management, Employment Support, Family Services, Healthcare, Housing, Mental Health Support, Outreach, Transportation, Vocational Training
Foundation for Homeless Veterans	https://www.ffhv.org/index	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Case Management, Employment Support, Housing, Mental Health Support, Outreach, Substance Use Treatment
Interfaith Community Services	https://interfaithservices.org/	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Basic Needs, Case Management, Employment Support, Financial Assistance, Housing, Legal Assistance, Mental Health Support, Military Transition Support, Substance Use Treatment
PATH	https://epath.org/	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Case Management, Employment Support, Housing, Mental Health Support, Outreach, Recovery Support
Townspeople	https://townspeople.org/	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Case Management, Housing, Service Referrals
US Department of Veterans Affairs	https://www.va.gov/homeless/	Government Agency	Employment Support, Healthcare, Housing (HUD-VASH), Legal Assistance, Mental Health Support, Outreach, Recovery Support, Service Referrals
Veterans Village of San Diego	https://vvsd.net/	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Basic Needs, Case Management, Dental Care, Employment Support, Financial Assistance, Housing, Legal Assistance, Mental Health Support, Substance Use Treatment
Volunteers of America Southwest	https://www.voasw.org/	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Benefits Advocacy, Case Management, Comprehensive Care, Family Support, Housing, Service Referrals
Wounded Warrior Homes	https://www.woundedwarriorhomes.org/	501(c)(3) Nonprofit	Basic Needs, Case Management, Employment Support, Healthcare, Housing, Mental Health Support, Transportation

Figure IIC. Map of Housing and Services for VEH in San Diego County



Appendix III - A History of Innovation: San Diego's Efforts to Address Veteran Homelessness

San Diego has a rich history of efforts to address veteran homelessness. Below is an overview of some of the pivotal efforts that have been implemented in San Diego over time. Some of these initiatives resulted from federal or state policies, but others were locally based responses that derived from the nonprofit sector and/or volunteer efforts. In many respects, San Diego has been a national leader and innovator in efforts to address veteran homelessness.

In 1933, San Diego was among the first counties in California to formally assist veterans and help connect them to resources and benefits. This was a precursor to a California state law in 1939 that permitted county boards of supervisors to appoint a “county service officer” whose duty it was to administer aid to veterans and provide other forms of benefits assistance and navigation. County Veteran Service Officers (CVSOs as they are now known) continue to play a critical role in helping veterans connect with and receive their federal and state benefits.⁶⁰ The need for this type of resource speaks to the challenges that veterans confront when they attempt to navigate the complex benefits system. This is even more pronounced for VEH.

Beginning in 2001, San Diego experienced a substantial increase in the veteran-focused non-profit public charities (VPNOs). A study from 2018 found that between 2001 and 2016, VPNOs increased in numbers as well as prominence for the critical role they play in providing services to veterans. Philanthropic support and contracts with the public sector have facilitated this rise. Additionally, the study found that veterans themselves play a critical role in these organizations and close to half of the VPNOs in San Diego had veterans in leadership positions while another one-third had veterans’ family members as leaders. Of particular note, it found that within San Diego’s VPNOs there was a widely shared belief that San Diego could serve as a national model for its collaborative approach and that this “San Diego way” of collaboration was an exemplar for other regions.⁶¹

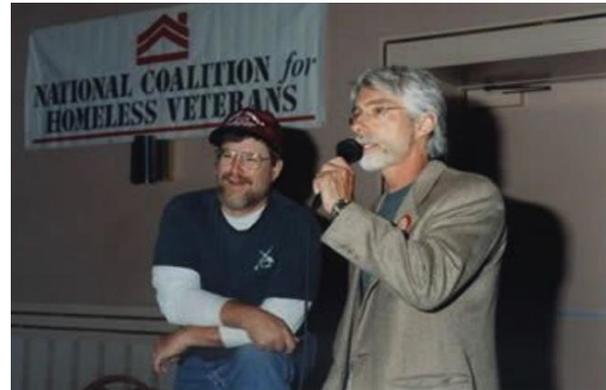
Stand Down

In 1988, two Vietnam War veterans organized an event in San Diego for VEH that would ultimately expand nationwide. Dr. Jon Nachison and Robert Van Keuren organized the first Stand Down in the summer of 1988 in response to the local surge in homelessness among veterans. The

event was inspired by the military practice used during war times of removing troops from battlefields and providing safe and secure spaces for self-care and recuperation.⁶² At the first San Diego Stand Down, more than 650 VEH received access to a range of resources and services, including personal hygiene kits, basic medical and dental care, clothing, VA benefits and enrollment assistance, shelter and legal assistance.⁶³ Vietnam Veterans of San Diego, now known as Veterans Village San Diego, provided support for the first Stand Down and has continued to host the event on an annual basis. It has grown into a multi-day event with numerous corporate, philanthropic, and public sector sponsors. It continues to provide a wide range of services and access to resources. In 2017, a second Stand Down was launched in North County. North County Veterans Stand Down is a four-day event held in Vista and run by volunteers. In recent years, San Diego Veterans Stand Down has served approximately 800 veterans annually. As such, it is estimated that approximately 30,000 VEH have been served since the first Stand Down in 1988.⁶⁴ The success of Stand Down in San Diego County inspired the national Stand Down movement with over 200 annual events nationwide. In 2002, the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, at the request of Nachison and Van Keuren, assumed the leadership role for the national Stand Down movement.⁶⁵ Due to the variation within the Stand Down national ecosystem, NCHV subsequently created a classification system with standards to guide communities across the U.S. as they plan and host Stand Downs. Stand Downs are

acknowledged to be one of the most impactful outreach approaches for VEH.⁶⁶

Image IIIA. Stand Down Founders Robert Van Keuren and Dr. Jon Nachison



Source:

<https://www.nchv.org/images/uploads/Stand%20Down%20Guide.pdf>

Homelessness Court

San Diego Stand Down was also the site for the eventual creation of another innovative response to veteran homelessness. At the first San Diego Stand Down, one of the most frequent requests from veterans in attendance was assistance with outstanding bench warrants with over one in five VEH making this request.⁶⁷ This was a major barrier to their reintegration into civilian society. At the second Stand Down in 1989, the first Homeless Court was held by the San Diego Superior Court. Its impact was immediately obvious. Between 1989 and 1992, it resolved close to 5,000 cases for 942 veterans. Designed to maximize VEHs' representation in court in a respectful, individually focused manner, its goal is to promote VEH self-sufficiency by clearing misdemeanor offenses which often serve as barriers to securing housing and employment. Homelessness Court's early

success led to its expansion, and it now holds monthly sessions across San Diego. It has also inspired other cities to create similar programs.⁶⁸ Homelessness Court's story is inspirational, and researchers at Homelessness Hub recently conducted an oral history of Homelessness Court with its founder, Steve Binder. A written synopsis will be released in the near future.

Image IIIB. San Diego County Homelessness Court Program



Source: <https://danewscenter.com/news/san-diegos-homeless-court-continues-to-be-a-model-for-the-nation/>

Project 25

While not explicitly focused on VEH, it is worth noting Project 25. In operation from 2011-2013, it employed a Housing First⁶⁹ model and of the 28 participants, five were veterans. This was a pilot program designed to provide housing and services to the county's chronically homeless individuals who were the most frequent and high-cost users of public services (such as ER visits, ambulance use, and jail time). Funded by the United Way and in collaboration with other local organizations, participants were placed in subsidized housing and received comprehensive wrap-around services. The

results were impressive: the expense of public services used by the participants declined by 67%; utilization of services (ambulances, days in jail, etc.) declined by 60-80%; the net return on the project during the pilot period averaged 234.5% between 2012 and 2013. Despite the positive results, at the end of the pilot period one-third of the participants still required significant support.⁷⁰ Project 25's proponents were unable to expand it due to the inability to secure funding. Proponents thought that hospitals and insurers would see the value in the program and would fund it, but that did not happen.⁷¹

1000 Homeless Veterans Initiative/Housing Our Heroes

Launched in 2016 under then City of San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer, the *1000 Homeless Veterans Initiative* was part of the City of San Diego and the San Diego Housing Commission's (SDHC) *Housing First-San Diego* three-year action plan to address homelessness and provide housing to 1,000 VEH. It had a budget of \$12.5 million with funds from the federal government, the City of San Diego and the SDHC. The initiative included four different programs: 1) landlord outreach; 2) rapid rehousing; 3) VASH vouchers for honorably discharged veterans; 4) Sponsor-based vouchers and services for veterans ineligible for VASH.⁷² Within 18 months, the initiative successfully met its goal of housing 1,000 veterans. The SDHC succeeded in getting 430 individual landlords to participate in the initiative with 45% of them first-time participants in SDHC rental assistance programs. Following the

success of the initiative, in June 2018 the San Diego City Council authorized \$4.4 million in remaining funds to be used by SDHC for additional landlord outreach and incentives to rent to people experiencing homelessness.⁷³

San Diego County Leave No Veterans Homeless Initiative

In February of 2023, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors launched the *Leave No Veteran Homeless* (LNVH) initiative with the goal of ending veteran homelessness in the county and achieving “functional zero.”⁷⁴ Functional zero refers to a data-driven, systems-focused approach to achieving a steady state where homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring. Community Solutions is a nonprofit organization that spearheaded and leads the Built for Zero Initiative and serves as a leader in providing jurisdictions with methodologies, tool kits and other resources to support efforts to achieve functional zero.⁷⁵

The LNVH initiative in San Diego developed a framework in collaboration with regional/state/federal partners and veteran-serving nonprofits. The framework included seven lines of efforts: community partnerships, data collection and reporting, housing solutions, supportive services,

veteran outreach, funding, and prevention and sustainability. Within these lines of efforts were several notable components: a landlord assurance fund to incentivize participation from private landlords to rent to veterans, a landlord recruitment campaign, regional coordination among and between local agencies, and a veteran-specific “by-name” list to identify and track the progress of all VEH in the region.⁷⁶ During the initial period of the initiative (July 2023-September 2024), it was reported by County Supervisor Jim Desmond that approximately 1,200 veterans were housed. In May of 2025, the County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to extend LNVH with a focus on continued outreach to prospective private landlords to accept VASH vouchers and provide a fund available to landlords to cover property damage that exceeded security deposits.⁷⁷

It should be noted that since 2017, five different jurisdictions within San Diego County developed and approved homelessness action plans. The list includes San Diego County, the City of San Diego, Carlsbad, La Mesa and Vista. However, LNVH is the only homeless action plan focused exclusively on VEH.

Appendix IV- Functional Zero: Lessons from Other Regions

The research team identified and studied regions that have already achieved functional zero with veteran homelessness to identify lessons learned pertaining to their success. Each region has its own unique challenges and existing infrastructure, and the research team acknowledges that what was successful in one region won't necessarily work in another region. Nonetheless, there are some important lessons to highlight. These are summarized below. According to Community Solutions, which houses the Built for Zero initiative, twelve communities have achieved functional zero for veteran homelessness. Riverside City and County have also reached this benchmark in 2016, but have since lost their designation. This section summarizes some lessons learned from six of these communities⁷⁸ (Arlington County, VA; Montgomery County, MD; Rockford, Winnebago & Boone Counties (RWB), IL; Bergen County, NJ; Abilene, TX; Riverside City and County, CA) in reaching and sustaining functional zero.

The Built for Zero initiative is based on the foundation of an accurate, accessible, and quality By-Name-List (BNL)⁷⁹ that is constantly updated to ensure that all homeless veterans are identified and tracked in a given jurisdiction. A major aspect to maintaining an effective BNL is to have an effective veteran outreach system.

Communities who have succeeded in reaching functional zero understand that veterans have a hard time seeking help or have trust issues with local and federal agencies such as the VA, and therefore have altered outreach approaches. For example, Riverside ensured that their outreach teams included female veterans to engage with female VEH, and non-profit teams for veterans opposed to VA involvement.⁸⁰ In Abilene, they practiced “radical hospitality” where they treated clients “as if the mayor were walking into [their] office” to give them a “dignified experience, while also helping to lower potential barriers to housing.”⁸¹ RWB implemented creative outreach strategies such as sending outreach staff with the client’s favorite foods or giving them a “taste” of housing through temporary housing vouchers to get them to agree to permanent supportive housing.⁸² In doing so, these communities were able to reach more VEH and initiate trust to build relationships to get VEH housed.

These communities also make it their priority to secure housing for unhoused veterans, regardless of eligibility for specific programs. Communities like Arlington and Riverside set aside housing vouchers or directly prioritize veterans in the homeless population when a housing placement comes up (Community Solutions, 2020a; 2020c).⁸³ In Bergen County, housing providers are

allowed to go “above and beyond” to bend rules to house their veterans.⁸⁴ Some communities like Montgomery effectively use their BNL to get a sense of how many of their homeless veterans would be able to utilize federal sources like SSVF or HUD-VASH, and how many would have to be prioritized for local funding and resources.⁸⁵ For veterans that are ineligible for VA funding or cannot secure HUD-VASH vouchers due to availability, local funding for Rapid Rehousing, permanent supportive housing, or housing vouchers will be leveraged to get them into housing (Community Solutions, 2017; 2020a; 2020b; 2020c).⁸⁶

Several communities - Arlington, RWB and Bergen- also make sure that they keep track of their veterans until they secure permanent supportive housing; they don’t take them off the list or abandon them once they get into short-term shelter. Having a coordinated entry or a single point-of-entry also ensures that all unhoused individuals that enter into the system are accounted for. Once a veteran is on the BNL, Arlington makes the most of their rapid rehousing housing funds to keep their veterans from disappearing while finding housing.⁸⁷ RWB keeps their veterans on the BNL until they exit their shelter or transitional housing into permanent supportive housing.⁸⁸ In Bergen, they have a “barrier-free emergency shelter that is well connected with permanent housing programs”, so that providers can easily keep in touch with VEH during the housing process.⁸⁹

While an unhoused veteran is navigating the homelessness services ecosystem, providers should employ intentional case management, with a progressive engagement approach as utilized in communities like Arlington County, VA and Abilene, TX. Progressive engagement entails focusing on the client’s needs to end or prevent their experience of homelessness.⁹⁰ Instead of putting every veteran through the same program or services, providers that spend time to determine the client’s needs and goals and the best plan to achieve them will be able to prevent new inflow, while effectively speeding up the process to get those on the BNL into housing and offer wraparound services that are needed to maintain their placement.

Aggressive landlord outreach is necessary to securing and maintaining housing placements for veterans. Communities that have achieved functional zero have found creative approaches to appeal to landlords that are hesitant to rent to unhoused individuals. Montgomery, for instance, has been sending gifts and pictures of prospective tenants to landlords to humanize them, and introduce all their housing staff to the landlords to assure that they will have the necessary support should issues arise.⁹¹ Many communities, like Arlington, have landlord mitigation funds that ensure monetary support for the reassurance of prospective landlords.⁹²

Having unified systems is crucial to achieving functional zero. All communities in this list have regular and consistent

meetings weekly or monthly to discuss the BNL, goals, and progress towards their goals. All relevant stakeholders come together under one goal to continue to discuss status updates even after reaching functional zero. Instead of focusing on competition between the different agencies and providers, they all unite under the same goal and empower each other instead.⁹³ Bergen, NJ, which has achieved functional zero for VEH and chronic homelessness, physically moved their stakeholders under one roof, so that they would be able to work more efficiently and can help their clients quicker and more conveniently.⁹⁴ Abilene, TX unified their shelter systems, so that all shelters utilized the same documentation and housing plan to simplify and streamline the process for provider and client.⁹⁵

Ending veteran homelessness is a major feat and outcomes can largely vary based on the capabilities of the staff and providers involved. Communities like Riverside, Abilene, Montgomery, Arlington, and RWB have found that dedicated staff members should be hired for certain roles like landlord and housing outreach. Having a full-time staff that focuses only on one key position is less likely to lead to burnout and poor outcomes for their clients. This extends to having one or more leaders that are

specifically in charge of bringing everyone together and leading the charge. For example, in Riverside, they had to bring in new leaders to rejuvenate the spirits as it was taking longer than expected to reach their goal, especially since most of the staff already had other full-time positions.⁹⁶ It is also important to have staff members with lived experience of military service in these organizations to fully understand the experience that unhoused veterans are going through to ensure that they feel supported by available resources.

For larger communities like Riverside, the issue of veteran homelessness was less overwhelming when providers were led to “focus on the individual they are trying to serve and set shorter term goals.”⁹⁷ By preserving stakeholder engagement, they were able to remain optimistic and achieve their larger goal.

It is important to highlight that most of the communities that have already achieved and have maintained functional zero have a significantly smaller population than San Diego. While San Diego has already been implementing some of these strategies through past initiatives like LNVH, the scale of veteran homelessness makes it more challenging.

¹ For the definitions of the different discharge statuses and a brief overview on eligibility of VA benefits based on discharge status, refer to the table on page 3 and page 7, respectively, of Angela K. Clague et al., “The Veterans Left Behind: Eligibility for Department of Veterans Affairs Benefits and Other Than Honorable Discharges,” *Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation* (2024), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA1363-13.html>.

² “Functional Zero,” *Community Solutions*, October 21, 2024, <https://community.solutions/built-for-zero/functional-zero/>.

³ “VA Homeless FAQs,” *US Department of Veterans Affairs* online, June 27, 2019, <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/faqs.asp#accordion-definition>. For detailed definitions of the four categories, please refer to:

[https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/H](https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HomelessDefinition_RecordkeepingRequirementsandCriteria.pdf)

omelessDefinition_RecordkeepingRequirementsandCriteria.pdf.

⁴ For more information on the VA's SSVF program, please refer to

<https://www.va.gov/homeless/ssvf/program-services/>.

⁵ "Definitions | Leave No Veteran Homeless | Engage San Diego County," *San Diego County*, 2025, [https://engage.sandiegocounty.gov/leave-no-veteran-](https://engage.sandiegocounty.gov/leave-no-veteran-homeless/widgets/63523/faqs#question10345)

homeless/widgets/63523/faqs#question10345.

⁶ Stephen Metraux and Emily Moore, "Veteran Homelessness," Chapter. In *The Routledge Handbook of Homelessness*. Routledge, March 30, 2023, 211–21, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351113113-22>.

⁷ Metraux and Moore, "Veteran Homelessness", 211-21; Jack Tsai, *Homelessness among U.S. Veterans: Critical Perspectives* (New York, Ny: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁸ Metraux and Moore, "Veteran Homelessness", 211-21.

⁹ "2024 Annual Report/Directory," *California Association of County Veterans Service Officers*, 2024, <https://www.cacvso.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Veterans-Annual-Report-2024-6.pdf>.

¹⁰ Joel Anderson and Nathan Fletcher, "Prioritizing Our Veterans: Establishing a Center for Military and Veteran Reintegration in East County" (Agenda Item, San Diego County, 2022), 1-6.

¹¹ Health & Human Services Agency, "Office of Military & Veterans Affairs," https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/ssp/veterans_services.html.

¹² California Association of County Veterans Service Officers, "2024 Annual Report/Directory."

¹³ Anderson and Fletcher, "Prioritizing Our Veterans", 1-6.

¹⁴ Sara Kintzle, Eva Alday, and Carl A Castro, "The State of the American Veteran: The Southern California Veterans Study," September 2023, <https://socialvetstudy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/thestateoftheamericanveteran-thesocalveteransstudy.pdf>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "HUD 2024 Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations," *U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development*, December 9, 2024, https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/C_C_PopSub_State_CA_2024.pdf; "HUD 2024

Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations," *U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development*, December 9, 2024,

https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/C_C_PopSub_CoC_CA-601-2024_CA_2024.pdf.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ "California Veteran Population Estimates by Ethnicity," California Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.,

https://www.calvet.ca.gov/VetServices/Documents/Vet_Ethnicity_Population.pdf

¹⁹ Olivia Lenson and Ryan Finnigan, "Veterans Served by California's Homelessness Programs," November 2023, https://turnercenter.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/subpop-brief_veterans.pdf.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Metraux and Moore, "Veteran Homelessness", 211-21.

²² Ibid.

²³ Metraux and Moore, "Veteran Homelessness", 211-21.

²⁴ See Appendix III for a more detailed discussion of the history of efforts to address veteran homelessness in San Diego

²⁵ National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, Stand Down Guide (n.d.),

<https://www.nchv.org/images/uploads/Stand%20Down%20Guide.pdf>.

²⁶ The estimate is based on the approximately 37 Stand Down events that have taken place between 1988 and 2025 with an average annual number of veterans served of approximately 800.

²⁷ National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, Stand Down Guide.

²⁸ The American Bar Association Commission on Homelessness and Poverty and The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, "Taking the Court to Stand Down: Homeless Court at Stand Down: A Collaborative Effort to Assist Homeless Veterans, Strengthen Communities and Maximize Court Resources," 2006, https://www.nchv.org/images/uploads/HCP_Stand_Down_Training_Book1_final.pdf.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Erica C. Bender, "Thank You for Your Service: The Rise of the Veteran Nonprofit Sector", *Proquest Dissertations & Theses*, (2018), 63-69, <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/thank-you-your-service-rise-veteran-nonprofit/docview/2121019451/se-2>.

³¹ “1,000 Homeless Veterans Obtain Rental Housing through Housing Our Heroes Initiative - SDHC,” SDHC, June 14, 2018, <https://sdhc.org/news-release/1000-homeless-veterans-obtain-rental-housing-through-housing-our-heroes-initiative>.

³² Functional zero refers to a data-driven, systems-focused approach to achieving a steady-state for where homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring. Refer to “Functional Zero” (Community Solutions, n.d.), <https://community.solutions/built-for-zero/functional-zero/>.

³³ Tenant-choice vouchers are awarded to the VEH, who can then use it towards a privately-owned unit of their choice, while project-based vouchers are attached to the affordable housing development, which specifically has units that are funded by HUD-VASH.

³⁴ The RTFH PITC data had these limitations: In 2021, it was optional to report the count of unsheltered VEH due to COVID, so there are no counts for unsheltered or total count of VEH for this year. The RTFH HIC data had these limitations: The voucher utilization data for 2019 is unavailable on the RTFH website.

³⁵ Note: we do not have state or national data for 2025.

³⁶ A national study identified a proportional inverse relationship between the increased availability of VASH vouchers and the decrease in VEH and increase in permanent supportive housing units. Please refer to: William N Evans, Sarah Kroeger, Caroline Palmer and Emily Pohl, “Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Vouchers and Veterans’ Homelessness, 2007 - 2017”, *Am J Public Health* 109, 10 (October 2019), 1440-1445, doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2019.305231.

³⁷ “Reports & Data,” Regional Task Force on Homelessness, n.d., <https://www.rtfhsd.org/reports-data/>.

³⁸ “HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) | HUD.gov / U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD),” n.d. <https://www.hud.gov/helping-americans/housing-choice-vouchers-homeless-veterans/>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ *Housing Choice Voucher Program Guidebook* (Public Indian Housing, 2021), 3.

⁴² “HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) | HUD.gov / U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD),” n.d.

<https://www.hud.gov/helping-americans/housing-choice-vouchers-homeless-veterans/>.

⁴³ Emily Treichler, PhD, and Sonya Gabrielian, MD, MPH, interview by Stacey Livingstone and Gloria Magallanes, Zoom, January 9, 2026.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ “Policy Statement: HUD-VA Supportive Housing Program” (National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, May 28, 2024), <https://nchv.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/NCHV-Policy-Statement-HUD-VASH-2024.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Pavao, Joanne, Jessica A. Turchik, Jenny K. Hyun, Julie Karpenko, Meghan Saweikis, Susan McCutcheon, Vincent Kane, and Rachel Kimerling. (2013). “Military Sexual Trauma among Homeless Veterans.” *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 28(Suppl 2):S536-41.

⁴⁸ See Appendix IV for a more detailed discussion of lessons learned from communities that have achieved functional zero.

⁴⁹ According to Community Solutions, which houses the Built for Zero initiative, twelve communities have achieved functional zero for veteran homelessness. Riverside City and County also reached this benchmark in 2016 but have since lost their designation. In our promising practices section, we incorporate strategies from six of these communities (Arlington County, VA; Montgomery County, MD; Rockford, Winnebago & Boone Counties (RWB), IL; Bergen County, NJ; Abilene, TX; Riverside City and County, CA) in reaching and sustaining functional zero.

⁵⁰ Valasek, CJ. Forthcoming. “Intersectional Identities and Issues among Veterans Experiencing Homelessness.”

⁵¹ Winer, Max, Shawn Dunlap, Cathay St. Pierre, D. Keith McInnes, and Russell Schutt. (2021).

“Homeless Veterans Living in Subsidized Housing and Receiving Supportive Services.” *Clinical Gerontologist* 44(4).

⁵² Washington, Donna L., Melissa M. Farmer, Su Sun Mor, Mark Canning, and Elizabeth M. Yano. 2015. “Assessment of the Healthcare Needs and Barriers to VA Use Experienced by Women Veterans: Findings from the National Survey of Women Veterans.” *Medical Care* 53:S23-S31.

⁵³ Community Solutions, “Functional Zero.”

⁵⁴ This is the annual count of unsheltered and sheltered people experiencing homelessness that takes place on a designated day/night every January. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

Development requires all Continuums of Care (CoCs) to plan and administer this local count.

(<https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hdx/pit-hic/#2025-pit-count-and-hic-guidance>).

⁵⁵ Tsai, *Homelessness among U.S. Veterans*, 1-12.

⁵⁶ Metraux and Moore, "Veteran Homelessness."

⁵⁷ Meghan Henry et al., "The 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress," (The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, January 2021),

<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/home.html>.

⁵⁸ U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, "VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) - Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E)," www.benefits.va.gov, n.d., <https://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/vsoc.asp>.

⁵⁹ U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, "SSVF Overview," www.va.gov, n.d., <https://www.va.gov/homeless/ssvf/ssvf-overview/>.

⁶⁰ California Association of County Veterans Service Officers, "2024 Annual Report/Directory."

⁶¹ Bender, "Thank you for Your Service."

⁶² National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, Stand Down Guide.

⁶³ Veterans Village of San Diego, "History of VVSD."

⁶⁴ The estimate is based on the approximately 37 Stand Down events that have taken place between 1988 and 2025 with an average annual number of veterans served of approximately 800.

⁶⁵ National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, Stand Down Guide.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ The American Bar Association, "Taking the Court to Stand Down."

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Housing First "is an approach to quickly and successfully connect individuals and families experiencing homelessness to permanent housing without preconditions and barriers to entry, such as sobriety, treatment or service participation requirements. Supportive services are offered to maximize housing stability and prevent returns to homelessness."

(<https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Housing-First-Permanent-Supportive-Housing-Brief.pdf>)

⁷⁰ Gallagher et al., "Project 25."

⁷¹ Davis, "San Diego Homeless Program Struggles to Expand."

⁷² San Diego Housing Commission, "Housing First - San Diego SDHC Homelessness Action Plan", https://www.sdhc.org/uploadedFiles/Housing_Innovations/Housing_First/1000%20Homeless%20Veterans%20Initiative%20Special%20Report.pdf.

⁷³ San Diego Housing Commission, "1,000 Homeless Veterans Obtain Rental Housing."

⁷⁴ Cassie N. Saunders, "County Launches Leave No Veteran Homeless Initiative", July 2023, <https://www.countynewscenter.com/county-launches-leave-no-veteran-homeless-initiative/>.

⁷⁵ Community Solutions, "Functional Zero."

⁷⁶ Desmond, "No Veteran Left Behind."

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ The study team focused on Arlington County, VA and Montgomery County, MD as these were the first two regions to reach functional zero for veteran homelessness. The following regions were chosen as they have achieved both functional zero for veteran and chronic homelessness: RWB Counties, IL, Bergen County, NJ, and Abilene, TX. Riverside City and County, CA was chosen due to its similar population and geographic location to San Diego, CA.

⁷⁹ "By-Name Data," Community Solutions, n.d., <https://community.solutions/quality-by-name-data/>.

⁸⁰ "Riverside County, California: Ending and Sustaining an End to Veteran Homelessness" (Built for Zero: Community Solutions, n.d.), <https://login.builtforzero.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Riverside-FZ-Case-Study-Veteran.pdf>.

⁸¹ Kaitlyn Ranney, "Abilene, Texas: Functional Zero Case Study - Built for Zero" (Built For Zero, November 18, 2020), <https://login.builtforzero.org/case-studies/abilene-texas-functional-zero-case-study/>.

⁸² Angie Walker, "Ending Homelessness: Using Creative Outreach Strategies to Reach the Hardest to House" (Community Action Partnership, n.d.), <https://communityactionpartnership.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Ending-Homelessness-CAP2017.pdf>.

⁸³ Built for Zero: Community Solutions, "Riverside County"; "Arlington, Virginia: Ending and Sustaining an End to Veteran Homelessness" (Built for Zero: Community Solutions, n.d.), <https://login.builtforzero.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Arlington-VA-Functional-Zero-Case-Study-Veterans.pdf>.

⁸⁴ "Bergen County CoC: Functional Zero for Veteran Homelessness" (Built for Zero: Community Solutions, April 2017), <https://login.builtforzero.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Bergen-County-Case-Study-Veteran.pdf>.

⁸⁵ "Montgomery County, Maryland: Ending and Sustaining an End to Veteran Homelessness" (Built for Zero: Community Solutions, n.d.),

<https://login.builtforzero.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Montgomery-County-MD-FZ-Case-Study-Veteran.pdf>.

⁸⁶ Built for Zero: Community Solutions, “Bergen County”; Built for Zero: Community Solutions, “Riverside County”; Built for Zero: Community Solutions, “Montgomery County”; Built for Zero: Community Solutions, “Arlington.”

⁸⁷ Built for Zero: Community Solutions, “Arlington.”

⁸⁸ Walker, “Ending Homelessness.”

⁸⁹ Built for Zero: Community Solutions, “Bergen County.”

⁹⁰ NAEH, “What Is Progressive Engagement?” National Alliance to End Homelessness, June 4, 2021,

<https://endhomelessness.org/blog/what-is-progressive-engagement/>.

⁹¹ Built for Zero: Community Solutions, “Montgomery County.”

⁹² Built for Zero: Community Solutions, “Arlington.”

⁹³ Built for Zero: Community Solutions, “Riverside County.”

⁹⁴ Built for Zero: Community Solutions, “Bergen County.”

⁹⁵ Ranney, “Abilene.”

⁹⁶ Built for Zero: Community Solutions, “Riverside County.”

⁹⁷ Ibid.