

Key Elements for Comprehensive Legislation to End Veteran Homelessness

107,000 veterans were homeless on any given night in 2009.¹ President Obama and the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) are committed to preventing and ending homelessness among veterans by 2015.² To achieve this goal, it is imperative that Congress enact comprehensive legislation that provides authority to VA to run a complete range of programs that have been proven effective at preventing and ending homelessness for other populations. Described below are the key elements necessary in any piece of comprehensive legislation, as well as information as to whether or not the provisions are included in S. 1237, which contains the Zero Tolerance for Veterans Homelessness Act, and H.R. 4810, the End Veteran Homelessness Act.

1. Establish a comprehensive homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing program at VA.

VA must have the responsibility to identify and provide assistance to all veterans who either have recently lost their housing or are in danger of doing so. S. 1237 authorizes VA to provide homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing services like those in HUD's HPRP program. H.R. 4810 increases the authorization for an existing VA program to \$100 million per year for prevention and re-housing, the minimum amount necessary. In addition, VA and the Department of Defense should work together to identify veterans who have prominent risk factors for homelessness.

2. Authorize an expansion of the Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program to serve 60,000 veterans and their families.

The HUD-VASH program provides rental assistance through HUD's Section 8 voucher program and case management, treatment, and support services through VA. It replicates the highly successful model of permanent supportive housing, getting veterans with the most severe, permanent disabilities off the streets and into safe, affordable housing. Congress has already funded 30,000 HUD-VASH vouchers, and S. 1237 authorizes 10,000 new HUD-VASH vouchers each year to reach a goal of 60,000 additional vouchers—the number needed to provide housing for all homeless veterans who need this intensive, long-term intervention in order to escape homelessness. H.R. 4810 does not include a similar provision.

3. Improve data collection on the extent of homelessness among veterans.

While much is known about homelessness among veterans, a great deal more could be learned by improving data collection regarding the extent and identifying risk factors of homelessness for this population. Under S. 1237, VA, HUD, and the Interagency Council on Homelessness would be required to establish a method for accurately tracking the number of homeless veterans nationwide and the type of assistance received. H.R. 4810 does not contain a provision to do this.

¹ <http://www.usich.gov/PDF/FactSheetVeterans.pdf>

² http://www.usich.gov/PDF/OpeningDoors_2010_FSPPPreventEndHomeless.pdf