



# Criteria and Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Veteran Homelessness

The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and its member agencies have adopted a vision of what it means to end all homelessness, ensuring that it is a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience. USICH, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have also developed specific criteria and benchmarks for ending Veteran homelessness in order to help guide communities as they take action to achieve the goal.

Communities that believe they have met the criteria and benchmarks can seek confirmation of their achievement through a formal interagency process by first [contacting one of their local federal representatives](#) at HUD, USICH, or VA for guidance on submitting all of the necessary information and data.

## Information in this Document

The information within this document is organized into the following sections:

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These criteria and benchmarks have been updated to reflect what we've learned after a year of reviewing and confirming communities and to ensure clearer communication of some of the expectations and intentions. The updates primarily focus on:

- Consolidating information, specifications, and clarifications released separately over the past year to make it easier for people to review and understand all of the information holistically.
- Revising Benchmark A to include Veterans experiencing long-term homelessness as well as chronic homelessness to make it clearer that no Veterans, with few and rare exceptions, can be remaining homeless for extended periods of time.
- Revising Benchmarks A and B and their specifications to clarify which Veterans who have entered transitional housing are included within exempted groups for the purposes of calculating these benchmarks. Our intention is to clarify how the information and data regarding Veterans who have made choices to enter transitional housing are used when calculating the benchmarks.

Definitions for the following terms are [provided below](#): chronically homeless; long-term homelessness; permanent housing destination; permanent housing intervention (including what an offer of a permanent housing intervention entails); transitional housing (differentiating bridge housing, service intensive transitional housing, and transitional housing appropriately addressing a clinical need); and Veteran. Communities will also find it helpful to review [Questions to Assess Whether Your Community Has Ended Veteran Homelessness](#) and these [case studies](#) from successful communities.

## **Purpose of the Criteria and Benchmarks**

Criteria and benchmarks work together to provide an ongoing assessment of a community's response to homelessness. While the criteria focus on describing essential elements and accomplishments of the community's response, benchmarks serve as important indicators of whether and how effectively that system is working on an ongoing basis. Together, these criteria and benchmarks are intended to help communities drive down the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness to as close to zero as possible, while building systems that support long-term, lasting solutions that can effectively and efficiently respond to future needs.

As we work with communities to apply these criteria and benchmarks, we consider the data and information holistically. For example, it may be possible for a community's data to indicate it achieved all of the benchmarks, while other information indicates that the expectations of the criteria haven't been met. Or the benchmarks may indicate that a community's system is working efficiently, but that system has not been working long enough to have fully achieved the goal.

We will continue to review and evaluate the effectiveness of these criteria and benchmarks as more communities seek federal confirmation for having achieved the goal and go on to do the hard work of sustaining an end to Veteran homelessness.

## Criteria for Achieving the Goal of Ending Veteran Homelessness

### **1. The community has identified all Veterans experiencing homelessness.**

The community has used coordinated outreach, multiple data sources, and other methods, to identify, enumerate, and engage all Veterans experiencing homelessness, including Veterans who experience chronic homelessness and Veterans who are unsheltered, as well as Veterans in shelters, Grant and Per Diem programs, other VA residential programs, other transitional housing programs, etc. For these purposes, a “Veteran” is any person who served on active duty in the armed forces, regardless of how long they served or the type of discharge they received.

### **2. The community provides shelter immediately to any Veteran experiencing unsheltered homelessness who wants it.**

While ending Veteran homelessness is primarily about the community’s capacity to connect Veterans to permanent housing, the community also has the capacity to immediately offer and provide some form of shelter (i.e., emergency shelter, bridge or transitional housing, other temporary settings) to any Veteran experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the community who wants it, while assisting the Veteran to swiftly achieve permanent housing. Access to shelter is not contingent on sobriety, minimum income requirements, lack of criminal record, or other unnecessary conditions.

### **3. The community provides service-intensive transitional housing only in limited instances.**

When transitional housing is provided to a Veteran, priority is placed on using it as a short-term option while working on a permanent housing solution. That may include: 1) using it as bridge housing for Veterans who are provided with permanent housing assistance but will need a place to stay while a unit is located, or 2) providing Veterans with a place to stay while they attempt to quickly find a permanent housing option for themselves. The community provides longer-term service-intensive transitional housing (i.e., transitional housing not being used for the purposes just described) only when Veterans are offered a choice of a permanent housing intervention, including HUD-VASH, SSVF, or similar assistance, but instead choose to enter a transitional housing program to receive specialized services, such as recovery supports, prior to moving into permanent housing. Further, Veterans who choose to enter service-intensive transitional housing are provided with ongoing opportunities to express a preference for, to request, and to access a permanent housing intervention instead, through an at-least-monthly review of their individualized service and housing plans and their desired outcomes for services and housing.

### **4. The community has capacity to assist Veterans to swiftly move into permanent housing.**

The community has identified a permanent housing intervention for all Veterans known to be experiencing homelessness, including those Veterans who have chosen to enter transitional housing, and are able to assist Veterans to move into their permanent housing quickly and without barriers to entry, using Housing First principles and practices.

**5. The community has resources, plans, partnerships, and system capacity in place should any Veteran become homeless or be at risk of homelessness in the future.**

The community has resources, plans, and system capacity in place for identifying and addressing the housing and services needs of (1) Veterans entering or returning to homelessness, and (2) Veterans at risk of homelessness. That means:

- a) The community is routinely using multiple data sources and conducting comprehensive outreach and engagement efforts to identify and assist homeless and at-risk Veterans and to understand where Veterans are entering the system.
- b) The community has an adequate level of resources and the capacity to provide appropriate services that will, whenever possible, prevent homelessness for at-risk Veterans.
- c) The community has an adequate level of resources and appropriate plans and services in place to continue to assist Veterans to swiftly move into permanent housing and to promote the long-term housing stability of all Veterans who have entered permanent housing.

## Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Veteran Homelessness

Communities should use a variety of information and data to assess whether they have achieved an end to Veteran homelessness, including their current active list of Veterans experiencing homelessness and the data necessary to calculate the following four benchmarks. Taken together, that information and data indicate how well a community's system is working to ensure that Veteran homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring. In reviewing progress against these benchmarks, communities should use the specifications in the section below. Communities should also document any special circumstances in their local context that should be considered during review.

While these benchmarks provide important indicators of whether and how effectively a community's system is working, they are not the only data or information we will review as part of the federal confirmation process. Meeting the benchmarks does not guarantee that a community will be confirmed as achieving the goal of ending Veteran homelessness if other data or information indicates that the goal has not yet been met.

In assessing progress against these benchmarks, and in submitting information for federal review and confirmation, data should be gathered and provided for the most recent 90-day period for which complete and accurate data is available. Communities are also strongly encouraged to regularly review such data against these benchmarks into the future, to ensure that the progress and effectiveness of local efforts have been sustained.

**Note about Version 3 of this document.** The most significant revision to these Benchmarks is in Benchmark A, adding an emphasis that both chronic and long-term homelessness among Veterans has been ended. This revision has been made to clarify the intent that, with few and rare exceptions, there should not be any Veterans who are experiencing long-term homelessness, whether they meet the disability requirement for chronic homelessness or not.

### **A. Chronic and long-term homelessness among Veterans has been ended.**

The community has no Veterans experiencing chronic or long-term homelessness, with the rare exceptions of:

- 1) Any Veteran who has been identified and offered an available permanent housing intervention, but who has not yet accepted;
- 2) Any Veteran who has been offered an available permanent housing intervention but has declined and instead chosen to enter a transitional housing program in order to appropriately address a clinical need, such as by providing, for example, treatment and services for homeless Veterans with substance use disorders or other mental health disorders, Safe Haven-like services for chronically homeless Veterans, or recuperative care for homeless Veterans post hospitalization; and
- 3) Any Veteran that has accepted a permanent housing intervention but is still actively in the process of identifying, securing, or moving into a unit. It is important to note that this exemption expires 90 days after acceptance of the permanent housing intervention.

The community continues to outreach to any Veterans experiencing long-term homelessness that has not yet accepted an offer of a permanent housing intervention, and continues to offer an available permanent housing intervention to those Veterans at least once every two weeks.

**Note:** For the purposes of this benchmark, the time a Veteran spends in transitional housing is included in the calculation of whether that Veteran is experiencing long-term homelessness.

## **B. Veterans have quick access to permanent housing.**

The community has a system in place to connect Veterans experiencing homelessness to permanent housing in an average of 90 days or less, measured from the day they are identified as experiencing homelessness to the day they enter permanent housing (with the exceptions described below.) The calculation of this average should include all Veterans who entered permanent housing in the past three months, with two rare exceptions:

- 1) For any Veteran who was identified and offered a permanent housing intervention, but did not initially accept the offer, the calculation of the average should only include the time from when they accepted the intervention until they moved into housing; and
- 2) Any Veteran who was offered a permanent housing intervention but declined and has instead chosen to enter service-intensive transitional housing, whether to address a clinical need or not, prior to moving to a permanent housing destination should not be included. Offers must be documented through a transparent, coordinated process within the homelessness service system so that a refusal of permanent housing intervention and the Veteran's choice to enter service-intensive transitional housing is easily verifiable.

**Note:** Communities seeking federal confirmation can document any special circumstances in their local context, such as their local housing market, that should be considered in review of their achievement of this benchmark. However, communities should do everything possible to streamline the delivery of housing assistance and housing search processes to make this timeframe as short as possible. For example, some communities have reduced their community-wide average to as short as 30 days. As communities continue to innovate and improve the delivery of housing assistance, we will continue to review the timeframe used for this benchmark.

## **C. The community has sufficient permanent housing capacity.**

The number of Veterans exiting homelessness and moving into permanent housing is greater than or equal to the number of Veterans entering homelessness.

**Note:** In cases where the community has very small numbers of Veterans experiencing homelessness, the number of Veterans entering homelessness may, at times, temporarily exceed the number of Veterans placed into permanent housing. Even in these cases, however, the long-term trend must still be consistent with reducing or preventing increases in the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness.

## **D. The community is committed to Housing First and provides service-intensive transitional housing to Veterans experiencing homelessness only in limited instances.**

The number of Veterans experiencing homelessness who enter service-intensive transitional housing is significantly less than the number of Veterans entering homelessness.

## Specifications for Calculating Benchmarks

The following specifications were designed to help communities calculate their performance against the benchmarks using their local data and information. To apply these specifications, communities must have comprehensive data systems and processes for keeping track of Veterans identified as experiencing homelessness and for documenting exits from homelessness, typically captured through an “active,” “by-name,” or “master” list.

### Requirements for Active Lists

Your community’s active list must identify all homeless Veterans, including those who are in unsheltered and sheltered locations (i.e., transitional housing, emergency shelter, and Safe Haven), regardless of funding source. Veterans who have entered any permanent housing destination do not need to be included on the active list or should have that outcome noted on the active list. The community must be able to demonstrate that the list has input from or is informed by all significant partners in the effort to serve Veterans experiencing homelessness, including the CoC, local VA Medical Center, VA funded providers, shelters, outreach workers, and additional community partners, such as food programs and law enforcement. The list may be populated by other data sources, such as HOMES, HMIS, or other comparable databases.

This [Master List Template and Benchmark Generation Tool](#), developed by HUD and its partners, is available for your community to use to manage your active list and calculate the benchmarks.

### Maintaining your active list

- Updates should be conducted at least monthly to ensure information is current.
- If a Veteran on the active list can no longer be located after repeated attempts for 90 days or more, the status of that Veteran can be changed from “active” to “missing” for purposes of calculating these benchmarks. If the Veteran is located at a later date and is still experiencing homelessness, the date of the most recent contact would become the new date of identification.
- If it is determined that an individual on the active list is not a Veteran, that individual should be removed from the active list and not included in data and calculations for these criteria and benchmarks, but should be included on a non-Veteran specific active list.

### Information and data you need to calculate benchmarks

1. **[Number of Veterans on active list]**
2. **[Number of Veterans experiencing chronic homelessness on active list]**
3. **[Number of Veterans experiencing long-term homelessness on active list]**
4. **[Date of identification]** of each homeless Veteran. That is, the date of initial contact with a homeless Veteran in any program, including street outreach, emergency shelter, transitional housing, Safe Haven, VA Medical Center, or at any other point of entry in the homelessness system. This date includes Veterans who are experiencing homelessness for the first time and those who may be re-entering homelessness after having exited for at least 90 days.
5. **[Date of documented offer of a permanent housing intervention]** The information regarding the documented offer should also include the type of permanent housing intervention offered (e.g., HUD-VASH, RRH, PSH, other subsidy).

6. **[Date of acceptance]** or **[date of decline]** of offer of a permanent housing intervention. In the specific case of Veterans who have previously declined an offer of a permanent housing intervention but who subsequently accept such an offer, the **[date of acceptance]** of the offer serves as the **[date of identification]** for these Veterans.
7. **[Date of move-in to permanent housing destination]**
8. **[Date of move-in to TH, by type of TH]**
9. **[Yes or No, entering TH in order to appropriately address a clinical need]**
10. **[Date of removal from Active List for other reasons]** The date that an individual was removed from the active list for reasons other than moving into permanent housing.

### **Benchmark A: Specification to measure whether long-term and chronic homelessness among Veterans has been ended.**

<b>Unit of Measurement:</b>	Number of Veterans experiencing long-term and chronic homelessness in the CoC's geographic area
<b>Contributing Programs:</b>	All projects administering emergency shelter, transitional housing, supportive housing, SSVF, HUD-VASH, street outreach, and permanent housing funded by CoC, local, state, or federal programs
<b>Data Source:</b>	Active List
<b>Target:</b>	Zero Veterans experiencing long-term and chronic homelessness
<b>Measurement Period:</b>	Continuous 90-day period preceding benchmark measurement (for example, June 1-August 31, 2016)
<b>Calculation:</b>	$  \begin{aligned}  &[\text{Number of Veterans experiencing chronic homelessness on active list}] \\  &+ [\text{Number of Veterans experiencing long-term homelessness on active list}] \\  &- [\text{Exempted Group 1}] \\  &- [\text{Exempted Group 2}] \\  &- [\text{Exempted Group 3}] \\  &= \text{Zero (0)}  \end{aligned}  $

**Exempted Group 1:** Those Veterans experiencing either chronic or long-term homelessness who have been identified and offered a permanent housing intervention within the last two weeks but who have not yet accepted. Communities are responsible for ensuring that these Veterans are continually engaged and receive a documented offer of permanent housing at least every 14 days.

**Exempted Group 2:** Those Veterans experiencing either chronic or long-term homelessness who have been offered an available permanent housing intervention but have declined and instead chosen to enter a transitional housing program in order to appropriately address a clinical need. Veterans who have chosen to enter transitional housing programs in order to access generalized case management or job training are not included within this exempted group. (Note: Federal agencies will not be asking for detailed or personalized information regarding such exemptions, such as official confirmation of clinical needs.)



**Exempted Group 3:** Those Veterans who have accepted a permanent housing intervention but who are still actively in the process of identifying, securing, or moving into a unit. Veterans who have been actively in the process of identifying, securing, or moving into a unit for more than 90 days are not included within this exempted group.

## **Benchmark B: Specification to measure whether Veterans have quick access to permanent housing.**

<b>Unit of Measurement:</b>	Community-wide average time from date of identification of homeless Veterans in the CoC's geographic area to date of move-in to a permanent housing destination
<b>Contributing Programs:</b>	All projects administering emergency shelter, transitional housing, supportive housing, SSVF, HUD-VASH, street outreach, and permanent housing funded by CoC, local, state, or federal programs
<b>Data Source:</b>	Active List
<b>Target:</b>	Community-wide average time from the date Veterans are identified as experiencing homelessness in the CoC's geographic area to the date they move-in to a permanent housing destination is 90 days or less
<b>Measurement Period:</b>	Continuous 90-day period preceding benchmark measurement (for example, June 1-August 31, 2016)
<b>Calculation:</b>	

[Total number of days for all non-exempted Veterans from identification to move-in to permanent housing]  
DIVIDED BY / [Total # of non-exempted Veterans]  
 IS LESS THAN OR EQUAL TO 90 days

**Exempted Group 1:** Those Veterans who were identified and offered a permanent housing intervention over the 90-day measurement period but did not initially accept the offer. For these Veterans, the calculation of the average should only include the number of days from when they accepted the intervention until they moved into housing. Communities are responsible for ensuring that these Veterans are continually engaged and receive a documented offer of permanent housing at least every 14 days.

**Exempted Group 2:** Those Veterans who have been offered an available permanent housing intervention but declined and have instead chosen to enter service-intensive transitional housing, whether to address a clinical need or not. Veterans who choose to enter service-intensive transitional housing are provided with ongoing opportunities to express a preference for, to request, and to access a permanent housing intervention instead, through an at-least-monthly review of their individualized service and housing plans and their desired outcomes for services and housing.

**NOTE:** A Veteran who is already in service-intensive transitional housing but is then offered a permanent housing intervention does not fall within Exempted Group 2. Veterans who are in a transitional housing bed/unit operating as bridge housing are also not included within this exempted group.

### **Benchmark C: Specification to measure whether the community has sufficient permanent housing capacity.**

<b>Unit of Measurement:</b>	Ratio of move-ins to permanent housing destinations to number of Veterans becoming homeless
<b>Contributing Programs:</b>	All projects administering emergency shelter, transitional housing, supportive housing, SSVF, HUD-VASH, street outreach, and permanent housing funded by CoC, local, state, or federal programs
<b>Data Source:</b>	Active List
<b>Target:</b>	Total number of Veterans moving into permanent housing destinations is greater than the total number of newly identified homeless Veterans
<b>Measurement Period:</b>	Continuous 90-day period preceding benchmark measurement (for example, June 1-August 31, 2016)

#### **Calculation:**

Total number of Veterans moving into permanent housing destinations over 90-day measurement period	$\geq$ IS GREATER THAN OR EQUAL TO	Total number of newly identified homeless Veterans within the 90-day measurement period
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### **Benchmark D: Specification to measure whether the community is committed to Housing First and provides service-intensive transitional housing to Veterans experiencing homelessness only in limited instances.**

<b>Unit of Measurement:</b>	Ratio of Veterans entering service-intensive transitional housing to Veterans becoming homeless
<b>Contributing Programs:</b>	All projects administering emergency shelter, transitional housing, supportive housing, SSVF, HUD-VASH, street outreach, and permanent housing funded by CoC, local, state, or federal programs
<b>Data Source:</b>	Active List
<b>Target:</b>	Total number of Veterans entering service-intensive transitional housing is less than the total number of newly identified homeless Veterans within the measurement period
<b>Measurement Period:</b>	Continuous 90-day period preceding benchmark measurement (for example, June 1-August 31, 2016)

#### **Calculation:**

Total number of Veterans entering service-intensive transitional housing within the 90-day measurement period	$<$ IS SIGNIFICANTLY LESS THAN	Total number of newly identified homeless Veterans within 90-day measurement period
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## Definitions

**Chronically homeless** – The definition of “chronically homeless” currently in effect for the CoC program is:

- (1) A “homeless individual with a disability,” as defined in section 401(9) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11360(9)), who:
  - (i) Lives in a place not meant for human habitation, a Safe Haven, or in an emergency shelter; and
  - (ii) Has been homeless and living as described in paragraph (1)(i) of this definition continuously for at least 12 months or on at least 4 separate occasions in the last 3 years, as long as the combined occasions equal at least 12 months and each break in homelessness separating the occasions included at least 7 consecutive nights of not living as described in paragraph (1)(i). Stays in institutional care facilities for fewer than 90 days will not constitute as a break in homelessness, but rather such stays are included in the 12-month total, as long as the individual was living or residing in a place not meant for human habitation, a Safe Haven, or an emergency shelter immediately before entering the institutional care facility.
- (2) An individual who has been residing in an institutional care facility, including a jail, substance abuse or mental health treatment facility, hospital, or other similar facility, for fewer than 90 days and met all of the criteria in paragraph (1) of this definition, before entering that facility.
- (3) A family with an adult head of household (or if there is no adult in the family, a minor head of household) who meets all of the criteria in paragraphs (1) or (2) of this definition, including a family whose composition has fluctuated while the head of household has been homeless.

**Long-term homeless** – A homeless Veteran who meets the length of time and stay requirements to qualify as chronically homeless, but:

- (1) The Veteran does not need to have a qualifying disability; and
- (2) The calculation of 12 months of homelessness includes stays in transitional housing.

**Permanent housing destination** – Comprises the following response categories as defined in HUD’s data standards (data element 3.12):

- Moved from one HOPWA funded project to HOPWA permanent housing (PH)
- Owned by client, no ongoing housing subsidy
- Owned by client, with ongoing housing subsidy
- Permanent housing for formerly homeless persons (such as: CoC project; or HUD legacy programs; or HOPWA PH)
- Rental by client, no ongoing housing subsidy
- Rental by client, with VASH housing subsidy
- Rental by client, with GPD Transition-In-Place (TIP) housing subsidy
- Rental by client, with other ongoing housing subsidy
- Staying or living with family, permanent tenure
- Staying or living with friends, permanent tenure

**Permanent housing intervention** – An intervention which provides access to a safe, stable, and affordable permanent housing destination, which might include a subsidy or other form of rental assistance, with appropriate services and supports. Interventions can include HUD-VASH, SSVF, and CoC program-funded rapid re-housing (where rental assistance is included), CoC program-funded permanent supportive housing, Housing Choice Voucher (HCV), access to an affordable housing unit, or other form of permanent housing subsidy or rental assistance.

- **Offer of permanent housing intervention** – An offer of an intervention in which the intervention is available at the time the offer is made. For example, a Veteran is offered the option of being issued a HUD-VASH voucher or getting access to a SSVF subsidy right away, and can begin the housing search process to secure a unit. In instances in which the Veteran is being offered a tenant-based subsidy, it means that the tenant-based subsidy is available to be issued and the Veteran can immediately be enrolled in the program. It does not mean that the Veteran is offered a specific unit to rent with that subsidy. In instances in which the Veteran is being offered an option to enter a subsidized or affordable unit, an offer does mean that the Veteran is being offered the opportunity to enter such a unit right away. An offer is not, for example, placement on a waiting list for an affordable unit or a subsidy program, or enrollment in a HUD-VASH program without an available voucher that can be issued right away. Offers must be documented through a transparent, coordinated process within the homelessness service system so that a refusal of permanent housing intervention or a choice to enter service-intensive transitional housing is easily verifiable.

**Transitional housing** – Transitional housing provides time-limited housing and services to Veterans. There are several different kinds of transitional housing programs and they are funded by a variety of sources, including VA's GPD program and HUD's CoC Program. This document refers to three distinct scenarios for providing transitional housing described below. To ensure that communities are quickly housing Veterans and supporting Veterans' choices, some stays in transitional housing may be exempted from benchmark calculations.

- **Bridge housing** – Transitional housing used as a short-term stay when a Veteran has been offered and accepted a permanent housing intervention prior to entering transitional housing but is not able to immediately enter the permanent housing. Generally provided for up to 90 days. Veterans within such programs or beds are included within calculations of all the benchmarks.
- **Service-intensive transitional housing** – Transitional housing not being used as bridge housing, in which Veterans are actively working to achieve permanent housing while they engage in clinically appropriate or other transitional housing services, such as generalized case management or job training services. Veterans who have been offered an available permanent housing intervention but have declined and instead chosen to enter a service-intensive transitional housing program are exempted from Benchmark B.
  - **Transitional housing appropriately addressing a clinical need** – A subset of service-intensive transitional housing in which Veterans are receiving targeted treatment and services for specific clinical needs, such as treatment and services for homeless Veterans with substance use disorders or other mental health disorders, Safe Haven-like services for chronically homeless Veterans, or recuperative care for homeless Veterans post hospitalization. Veterans who have been offered an

available permanent housing intervention but have declined and instead chosen to enter a transitional housing program in order to appropriately address a clinical need are exempted from both Benchmarks A and B.

**Veteran** – An adult who served on active duty in the armed forces of the United States, including persons who served on active duty from the military reserves or the National Guard. For the purposes of these criteria, a Veteran is any person who served in the armed forces, regardless of how long they served or the type of discharge they received.