

News Update: VA Housed 46,000 Veterans in 2023

Shawn Liu: [00:00:00] Welcome to Ending Veteran Homelessness, your firsthand look into our nation's efforts to ensure that every Veteran has a safe and stable place to call home. From the Department of Veterans Affairs, Homeless Programs Office, I'm your host, Shawn Liu.

If you're a Veteran who's Homeless or at risk of homelessness, reach out.

Call the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 877-424-3838. Trained counselors are standing by to help 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That number again is 877-424-3838.

Hey everybody! Shawn here. We've got another news update for you: the final results of our Calendar Year 2023 Homelessness Goals.

So to dive on in, you know it, we brought her back. Jill Albanese, the Director of Clinical Operations here in the Homeless Programs [00:01:00] Office. Let's just get to the announcement. Jill, welcome to the show.

Jill Albanese: Hey, thanks, Shawn.

Shawn Liu: Again, like you are basically the most frequent guest on this show. So once again, I think we have you on almost all the news updates, which is just a delight. And we got a really big one.

Today, January 30th, 2024, we are announcing the results of our 2023 Homelessness Goals.

Really, really important work that was done for homeless Veterans. But before we do that, Jill, for those who might just be listening in for the first time and you're like, "What are you talking about? What are these homelessness goals?" Can you just give us a super quick recap on what the 2023 Homelessness Goals were?

Jill Albanese: Yeah, absolutely. First of all, Shawn, thanks for having me. I'm so happy to be a frequent guest here with you. So just a quick recap on what our goals were for the calendar year of 2023. They were pretty ambitious. Back in February we set three goals and kind of a sub goal.

So basically the goals were that we were going to permanently house 38,000 Veterans experiencing homelessness. We also [00:02:00] set another goal to ensure that of those Veterans that we housed within the calendar year, we wanted to make sure that those Veterans stayed in housing. That 95% of the Veterans that we housed remained in permanent housing. We also set kind of a sub goal, as we call it, that if Veterans did return to homelessness, and we know that some Veterans will for a variety of reasons, we wanted to ensure that at least 90% of those Veterans were either rehoused or back on a path to permanent housing.

And then we set yet another goal to address the crisis of unsheltered homelessness. We set a goal to engage with 28,000 unsheltered homeless Veterans. And just as a reminder, when we're talking about folks who are unsheltered, those are the folks that are living in encampments, living in their cars, living in the streets.

So really a, a very vulnerable population that we really wanted to focus on.

Shawn Liu: Really appreciate that. And, for folks who've been listening to the podcast for the last couple months, you know we actually had Jill on back in November because in [00:03:00] November we actually discovered that we achieved two of the three goals... We basically achieved those goals early where we had housed at least 38,000 homeless Veterans as of our October update. And that we engaged with over 28,000 unsheltered Veterans, again with that same October update.

But that prevention of returns to homelessness goal, that was still in flux. So we now have the results. And likewise, you had mentioned when you were on that we weren't just done.

Now that we met the goals, we weren't gonna stop housing new Veterans and just move on with their day. No, we were gonna keep housing Veterans. And so we have you on again today, Jill, to essentially give us that final update. So my understanding is you have the recent results as of December 31st, 2023.

So we're basically looking at all of the activity that VA and our community partners did to house, engage, and prevent the homelessness for homeless Veterans. January 1st, 2023. December 31st, 2023. Okay, Jill. Without further ado, how did we do?

Jill Albanese: We did fantastic, Shawn [00:04:00] and I just cannot believe how much work folks have been doing out there in the field at our medical

centers, our SSVF grantee partners, our Grant and Per Diem partners, our HCHV contractors. All of our friends and our Continuums of Care that have worked with us, we have done fantastic.

So I just will say, and just a reminder, our goal was to house 38,000 Veterans. We actually housed 46,552 Veterans in the calendar year. So just huge. That is 122% of our goal, so fantastic news.

Shawn Liu: Jill. That's, that's amazing. I know you were gonna keep going, but like, I just wanna pause a second, and that's a little bit... It's outstanding. I don't wanna necessarily... Like, my instinct is to say it's a little bit absurd by how much we were able to exceed the goal. But I, I do wanna focus less on the numbers and more on the Veterans.

That's a lot of Veterans who were formally homeless who are now housed. So Veterans who are having a good, safe place to sleep at night tonight because of that [00:05:00] work.

That, that's a lot of Veterans and significantly more Veterans than what we sent out to house. Uh, wow.

Jill Albanese: It's, it's, it's tough to think about that many Veterans in a housing crisis, you know. Over 46,000 folks in a housing crisis. And, I'm so happy that we were able to house over 46,000 Veterans. I know that there's still more work to do, but it's just amazing, to be able to help that many folks.

Shawn Liu: What were some of the other results? Yeah.

Jill Albanese: So the other results looked great too. We set that goal to make sure that uh, 95% of our folks remained in permanent housing. And about 96% of the folks that we housed remained in permanent housing. So again, that is just a lot of work. We got folks housed, we kept them housed. There were a few folks that fell out of permanent housing and returned to homelessness. But of those, we were able to get 96% of those folks back on a path to permanent housing. So our goal was to make sure that at least 90% of folks were back on a path to permanent housing, and we [00:06:00] actually got 96% of those folks back on a path to getting permanently housed again.

So really good results. And again, we won't stop until we get all of those folks reengaged and back on that path to permanent housing.

Shawn Liu: Really, fantastic stuff. I also just want to acknowledge, this was one of the goals that I was kind of most proud that we had taken up at VA. I feel like work to figure this out and essentially improve the outcomes for Veterans, I feel is like some of the most important work Jill, at least for me, that in my time at VA that we've taken up.

I mean, I don't know if you feel the same way. But I feel like, like this is just so great work because it really is about leaving no Veteran behind and making sure that the work that we do sticks for them.

Just to unpack and get a little bit specific with the numbers. So, again, as you mentioned, we housed 46,552 Veterans.

About 95.9% of them remained in housing. However, 1,919 Veterans did [00:07:00] unfortunately return to homelessness. That was about 4.1% of the Veterans that we housed. And of the Veterans who returned to homelessness, 1,850 were actually rehoused or placed back on a path to rehousing, meaning they're back in our system. We're caring for them again. And that represents 96.4% of the Veterans who had returned to homelessness. So we both met and exceeded those goals. And you know, it's nice to say that we men exceed those goals, but more importantly, as you pointed out, that is really about our commitment to making sure that we're getting them back into our care and getting them back on the path to stability and safety.

Jill Albanese: Yeah, Yeah that's right. Yep, that's right. We heard time and time again just how grateful and sometimes surprised some of the folks were that people took the time even though they maybe fell out of housing. And sometimes we had Veterans who moved across the country, right? They lost their housing, they moved to another place, and we made sure that when they moved and they contacted VA, we were there for them and that we were working towards getting them housed again.

Shawn Liu: Yeah. And Jill, I know you and I have both done clinical work in some of these homeless programs earlier in [00:08:00] our careers, and so we probably both have experiences of Veterans who do successfully complete our programs, do get housing, but then unfortunately need to come back to us for help. And I was always struck with the level of shame embarrassment that they felt. Like they felt like they let us down. And where it's kind of be the other way around, like, "No, no, no, like our job is to support you." I wanna kind of honor that emotional journey for the Veterans who did return to homelessness and thank them for their commitment to themselves to reengage and get back on that path.

Because ultimately I think we both agree that, you know, this, this housing journey is worth it. The stability is worth it.

Jill Albanese: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

Shawn Liu: So we got one more goal. That was the goal to engage with unsheltered Veterans. How did we do with that one?

Jill Albanese: We did great. So our goal was to engage with 28,000 Veterans, and we actually engaged with 40,203 unsheltered Veterans. And again, those are those very vulnerable Veterans who are living on the streets or maybe in cars, maybe in encampments. There's just such a huge crisis. Our [00:09:00] goal was to engage with those folks and get them into shelter, into permanent housing eventually. So again, this is really difficult work and doing outreach, in unsheltered situations takes a lot of skill. It takes a lot of patience. And so, just really commend the work that's happened at the medical centers, the work that our grantees, SSVF and GPD grantees have done, our contractors. And we know we got a lot of help from our COC partners. It was really a team effort.

Shawn Liu: Outstanding stuff. I want to put this into context a little bit, Jill. In between the last time we had you on, we actually got the results of what we call the 2023 Point-in-Time Count. Folks who are in the business know that when we think about the progress to end Veteran homelessness, our year over year, our annual benchmark is something that our partners at the US Department of Housing and Urban Development put on, it's called the Point-in-Time Count. I sometimes describe it to people as homeless census. And in between when we last had you on and now, we actually got the results of the 2023 Point-in-Time Count.

[00:10:00] This was basically from January 2023. Probably one or two months before we actually kicked off these Homelessness Goals. So I just wanna acknowledge that the results of the PIT Count don't reflect the work that we do. The work that we did this year will be reflected the 2024 PIT Count. But what we saw was that Veteran homelessness, frustratingly actually went up from 2022 to 2023.

It actually went up 7.4%. And one of the things when we were diving into the data that was becoming apparent was how the need out there is so great. There are a lot of Veterans in crisis. There are a lot of Veterans in need. And we don't have good data to back this up yet, but there's a suspicion out there that a lot of these might be Veterans who are experiencing homelessness for the first time.

And what we're seeing also is a lot of Veterans who might be experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Jill, are there reflections when you see all of the work that was done and the sheer number of Veterans that were helped this year in the context of what might be increasing need, how do you think about those different dynamics that are at play in our [00:11:00] country?

Jill Albanese: Good point about the Point-in-Time Count too. And I know the data that we just received is a year old. When we looked at the Point-in-Time Count results, it did show that there was an increase in homelessness among Veterans. I think what was most alarming was the increase in the number of unsheltered Veterans.

Again, those are the folks that we really worry about the most. I think there are a lot of factors at play. We talk about this a lot. That first and foremost the rent is just extremely expensive and more and more folks are falling into homelessness because of this rental market condition where it is just too expensive. And if they miss one rent payment, they just may not be able to catch up. And this is really something that is impacting lots of folks including our Veterans.

I think the other issue is that there were a lot of flexibilities that were allowed during the pandemic that we took full advantage of. Those really started to taper off at the end of 2022 and beginning of 2023. So I think that had an impact as well. Even though the Public Health Emergency didn't end until May, a lot of the [00:12:00] resources were out. Resources had dwindled down and were not available as much as they were at the beginning of the pandemic. So I think that also played a huge factor.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, that makes a ton of sense, Jill. And as we think about where we're headed now, especially as we're starting to kind of wind down 2023. We're actually in 2024 now. I imagine that we're actually trying to figure out what are our next goals. What they're gonna be. My understanding: you don't have anything to announce yet, but there's a good chance that we might bring you on and get it a couple months to talk about it.

Before we let you go, Jill, this is, we really, really always appreciate having you on, especially to provide these great updates. Before we let you go, are there things that you want to let Veterans know about the work that VA had done this year for their fellow Veterans who were homeless or experiencing housing crises?

Jill Albanese: If you know of a Veteran who is in a housing crisis, even if they're not homeless, if you know that folks are struggling, please ask them to contact us. We want to help them. We don't wanna see any other Veterans fall into [00:13:00] homelessness. So as much as we can help, we wanna help.

Yes, we've met the goals, but the work doesn't stop. We're gonna continue to work just as hard as we have this past year to make sure that every Veteran has a place to call home. The work that we've done this calendar year, the work that we did the year before, really demonstrates our commitment to not leaving folks behind and just making sure that we really are reaching out to every Veteran who needs our help.

It is our mission, it's our passion. For most of us who work here, it's not a job. It's really our passion.

Shawn Liu: Jill Albanese is the Director of Clinical Operations here in the Homeless Programs Office. Jill, my friend. Always great to have you on. Thank you so much for the gift of your time.

Jill Albanese: Thank you, Shawn.

Shawn Liu: If you wanna know more about the services that VA provides to Veterans experiencing homelessness and housing instability, visit us online at www.va.gov/Homeless.

And if you're a Veteran who's Homeless or at risk of homelessness, reach out. Call the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 877-424-3838. [00:14:00] Trained counselors are standing by to help 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That number, again is 877-424-3838.

That's all for now. We hope that you found this time to be valuable and that you feel empowered in our collective work to ensure that every Veteran has a safe and stable place to call home.

Take care.