

# NEWS UPDATE - Announcing VA's FY 2024 Homelessness Goals

**Shawn Liu:** [00:00:00] Welcome to Ending Veteran Homelessness, your first hand 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, 7 days a week. That number again is 877-424-3838.

Hey everybody, it's Shawn with another news update for you. I feel like every March we have these kind of new updates. I think that's kind of a trend that's going on.

But yeah, we have new goals to announce for 2024. And, as if on cue, you know what I'm gonna say, we brought her back, Jill [00:01:00] Albanese, Senior Advisor and Director of Clinical Operations here in the Homeless Programs Office to get the 411.

Let's go ahead and just dive on in.

Jill, welcome to the show.

**Jill Albanese:** Hey, Shawn. It's great to be back.

**Shawn Liu:** We're, it's once more, third verse, same as the first two, so to speak. We're back with some new goals for 2024. And let's be honest, we all kind of saw this coming, right? The last two years were any indication around February, March, announcing new goals, it takes us through the year and sure enough, as if on cue, here we are.

**Jill Albanese:** Yeah, we knew it was coming, so you're absolutely right. Here it is, springtime, and we're ready to announce new goals.

**Shawn Liu:** We're ready to announce new goals. Last time you were on the show, we did an announcement of the results of the 2023 goals. Without rehashing it, I'm just going to put a link to that in the description.

It's actually in your podcast feed, too. You can go back and check it out. We made that announcement around January, not too long ago.

So, yeah, Jill, without further ado, let us know. What are our goals for 2024?

**Jill Albanese:** Okay, it's pretty exciting. It actually doesn't look a [00:02:00] whole lot different than last year. So, last year, folks may remember, we also set, calendar year goals. One major shift this year is that our goals are going to be fiscal year goals instead of calendar year goals. Our first goal is a permanent housing placement goal, which is similar to what we did last year. We bumped it up a bit. Instead of setting a goal to house 38,000 Veterans experiencing homelessness, we actually set that goal at 41,000. We want to place 41,000 Veterans into permanent housing in fiscal year 2024.

Second piece of that is similar to what we did last year, where we want to make sure that the Veterans that we place in permanent housing don't fall back into homelessness.

We set our goal to ensure that 95% of those Veterans who we place in housing remain in housing.

The third goal is our unsheltered engagement goal. And folks may remember that we set a target last year to engage with at least 28,000 Veterans who [00:03:00] were experiencing unsheltered homelessness. These are the folks that we're so worried about and are the most vulnerable. These are folks who are living in encampments, living in cars, maybe even living on the streets. This year, we decided to bump that up quite a bit. We're actually hoping to engage with at least 40,000 unsheltered homeless Veterans in this fiscal year.

So it's very ambitious. It's a bit of a stretch goal, if you will. But we know that we can do it. And we know that it's just vitally important that we reach these folks.

**Shawn Liu:** Outstanding. Okay, so it sounds like we have, three main goals again. A permanent housing goal to house 41,000 homeless Veterans. We've kept the, prevention of returns to homelessness. So, for those Veterans who got housed, if they do return to homelessness, we'll figure out how to get them back into our care. But we want to keep that at 95 percent of the Veterans that we house stay housed. And then for engagement of unsheltered Veterans, 40,000 Veterans.

Now, Jill, that's a lot, and I want to kind of unpack all of that little by little.

To start, you used the term fiscal year, [00:04:00] and I know that we're talking about calendars now, and when do we start and when do we stop calendars. Because in the past, if I remember correctly, our previous two goals in 2022 and 2023, those were calendar year goals, which meant January 1st, December 31st. Basically what the general public thinks of when they think about a year, January to December.

But you mentioned fiscal year. Can you tell us a little bit about what a fiscal year is, when does that take place, and why actually we made the switch?

**Jill Albanese:** Thanks. It's a great question. So, the short answer is the fiscal year is really what we operate... This is our operating budget year. For VA, our fiscal year starts October 1st. So, runs through September 30th, obviously.

We decided that we wanted to switch to a fiscal year goal for a couple of reasons.

One of the primary reasons is that we already have performance measures and targets that we set on the fiscal year. And so, we wanted to be consistent. The other piece of that is some of our community partners, [00:05:00] our grantees, for example, they all operate on a fiscal year.

So it just made sense for us to align all of our efforts on the fiscal year instead of having some efforts be calendar year goals and some efforts be fiscal year goals and targets.

**Shawn Liu:** Yeah, and if I remember correctly, you know, we heard some reports, that whole calendar year fiscal year difference was a big mental, like, cognitive roadblock, or at least speed bump. Especially that first year in 2022, it was kind of hard for folks who were so calibrated to fiscal year, so accustomed to fiscal year, to go back to like, "Oh wait, we're talking January to December? How does actually that work out with the way that we've been doing all of our other business?"

**Jill Albanese:** Yeah, that's right. We got a lot of feedback from the field saying it is a little bit chaotic for us to have to track performance measures that are based on the fiscal year. But then we've got calendar year goals that we're looking at dashboards that are calendar year. Again, we just wanted to make sure that we're aligned, be consistent, and I think it's really going to help the field out a lot too when they're looking at tracking different measures and [00:06:00] different performance metrics.

**Shawn Liu:** Yeah, in many ways, we want them focused on patient care, not this weird bean counting, bureaucratic stuff. Like, take care of the Veterans. And if there are ways in which we can make that taking care of the Veterans easier by reducing the amount of weird bureaucracy, I think everybody wins there.

**Jill Albanese:** That's true, and I think it's important to know you make a great point there that we really want to focus on Veteran care. One of the ways that we look at improving the way we provide services to Veterans who are homeless is we're very data driven. And a lot of our data reports are fiscal year reports, and so we need to be able to use those reports to improve what we're doing.

**Shawn Liu:** Yeah, use our existing resources, our existing technologies, don't reinvent the wheel when we've already figured it out.

**Jill Albanese:** Exactly.

**Shawn Liu:** Jill, I want to shift gears a little bit, and I want to talk about the actual goal targets themselves. For the last two years, the Secretary had charged us back-to-back to house 38,000 homeless Veterans.

41,000 homeless Veterans for this fiscal year is definitely an [00:07:00] increase. An increase of about, what, 3,000 Veterans in the target? And similar to 38,000, it's both a nice kind of whole number, but also somehow oddly specific.

And then, just as an aside, the unsheltered engagement went up dramatically. Last year, we set a goal for engaging with 28,000 unsheltered Veterans. This year, it's 40,000. That's a massive, that's a 12,000 Veteran jump. Can you tell a little bit about what some of the understanding, the discussions, the rationale for both of those increases?

**Jill Albanese:** In looking at our performance, really what we used to set these goals and targets was past performance. We looked at how we did last year with permanent housing placements, unsheltered targets, and we know that we can meet the 41,000 housing placements. We know that we can meet the 40,000 unsheltered target. In addition to looking at how we did overall last year, we also looked at how we're doing in the first quarter.

Another thing that we took into consideration was the HUD Point-in-Time [00:08:00] Count. When we saw the results of the HUD Point-in-Time Count,

and just as a reminder, that is just what it says. It's a measure of how many folks are experiencing homelessness at a point in time usually takes place in January.

All communities count the number of homeless folks, not just Veterans, but all individuals experiencing homelessness. And we saw where the biggest increase was, in the numbers of Veterans experiencing homelessness was in the unsheltered counts. So we have to do what we can to make sure that we are connecting those folks to housing programs and getting them off the streets.

The need is great. We know there is a huge need for us to reach out to the unsheltered folks. And also we know that we can do it.

While it is a huge increase, from what we proposed last year, looking at past performance and looking at first quarter data, we know that we can meet that.

**Shawn Liu:** Yeah, and I also kind of acknowledge that we know that we can meet it, but it's not, it's not a, we're not a shoe in for this, right? It's not in the bag. We still have to, and less so you and me, and more the dedicated [00:09:00] staff across the country, and our grantees and our community partners, they still have to do the thing, right?

Like, it's not an easy win, and we just throw up the peace sign and go home to dinner. Like, there's still actually a lot of work to do. And in many instances, we're kind of facing a more challenging landscape. You mentioned the PIT Count. We've seen the impact of not only the rising rent costs but increases in eviction rates. There are a lot of Veterans out there in need. And I'm curious to see how the new barriers that have emerged in 2024 will impact the work.

So it's nowhere near in the bag, but I think to your point, it is very doable, right? Like it's not, um, you know, like the cancer moonshot or anything like that.

It will still require a lot of work and a lot of partnership and collaboration. But it's something, and you know, Jill, I think three years in now, you and me got me asking you, "Jill, this lofty thing, can we do it?" You're like, "Yeah, we can do it." And I'm sure in the past you were like, I don't know, Shawn, but I'm going to say we can do it again.

Now, I think we're pretty confident now, like, the teams out there doing [00:10:00] this work, they're amazing. We know what works, we know what the solutions, we just have to execute.

**Jill Albanese:** Yeah, it's not an easy goal at all. None of these are easy goals. It takes a tremendous amount of staff time. It takes dedication. The folks that work in our homeless programs and our community providers, they're doing this because they're dedicated to the mission and dedicated to the work. And it is not easy work at all, as you pointed out. This is not something that we're like, "Oh, yeah, it's going to be easy for us to do. No problem." That's not the case at all. Both the permanent housing placement and the unsheltered target and the returns, these are all really lofty goals that we've set. And it's going to take a tremendous amount of dedication from our staff in the field.

**Shawn Liu:** Yep, yep, really, really well said.

Okay, Jill, before we let you go, there are probably folks who are listening in, it's like, "Okay, great. Like, you've done two years, here's year three. How can we help?" What are the ways in which our listeners can help with this mission?

**Jill Albanese:** Yeah, thanks for that. First and foremost, if you know a Veteran who is experiencing a housing crisis or is homeless, please make sure that you connect them [00:11:00] to the VA. We want to help those folks and there are a couple of ways we can do that. Folks can go to the VA. Folks can go to one of our community providers, they can certainly call the Call Center for Homeless Veterans. So please make sure that if you know of a Veteran, we want them connected to us so that we can help them.

The second piece is if you know of a landlord or you are a landlord yourself and you have a place, you have a rental, we need landlord partners for sure. That is huge. We cannot do this without our landlord partners in the community. So, if you are a landlord or you know of a landlord, please connect them to VA. We want to be able to help and please rent to a Veteran.

If you're an employer or you know of an employer, please hire our Veterans. That's a step toward housing stability and it makes sure that our folks don't return to homelessness if they have meaningful and gainful employment.

So, a couple of things right off the top that I think folks can think about when they're looking at ways to help Veterans experiencing homelessness.

**Shawn Liu:** Jill Albanese is the Senior Advisor and Director of Clinical Operations here in the Homeless Programs Office.

[00:12:00] Jill, my friend, always great to have you on. Thank you so much again for the gift of your time.

**Jill Albanese:** Thanks, Shawn.

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

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