

EVH - An Introduction to Veteran Homelessness, Part 3: Tools in the Toolkit

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 everyone, Shawn here. Welcome to part three of our mini series on an Introduction to Veteran Homelessness.

To close out this series, we're going to provide you information about the tools in our toolkit, the the different interventions that we at VA provide, and the programs and services that deliver them.

To help you follow along, we've also included a PDF in the episode's description. You [00:01:00] can click on it in your phone, or your desktop app, whichever one you're listening to this episode with. It contains a little graphic with hyperlinks to the different programs and services that we're going to talk about today.

Having a visual may help orient you to all of the stuff that we'll talk about.

Okay, let's dive on in.

Joining us first is Jill Albanese, Senior Advisor to the Executive Director and Director of Clinical Operations here in the Homeless Programs Office to tell us about the One Team Approach, which is the approach that we're using to connect all of the different programs and services that you're going to hear about in this particular episode.

Jill, thank you so much for being here with us today.

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

Shawn Liu: Excellent. And you've definitely been one of our most prolific podcast guests here. So we're really pumped to have you on this special Intro Homelessness series.

We've been championing our One Team Approach as a new, updated way deliver programs and services to homeless Veterans.

And, you and I have been talking about One Team for a while. You've been actually been a champion of One Team for many years now, and it's great to see it come to [00:02:00] fruition. For some, it could be a little bit counterintuitive, especially if they've been doing homeless services for a while, but have seen it from their own program interventions. However, for those who are coming to this for the first time and this intro series is basically the first thing that they're seeing and hearing about homeless services, I'm pretty sure what you're about to say is going to seem so intuitive to the point of being obvious, and I was like, "Shawn, Jill, why are you leading with that?"

But, to kind of help orient us, what is the One Team approach that we are implementing throughout our homeless programs here in 2024?

Jill Albanese: You and I have been talking about this for a long time and really wanting to implement this. So it's exciting to see it finally happening.

So when we talk about the Homeless Program Office One Team approach, what we're talking about is a coordinated approach. It's an approach that integrates our homeless programs that will help us address homelessness among Veterans.

We really want to make sure that folks establish clear roles so that we know, yes, we're integrated, yes, we're coordinated, but everybody knows [00:03:00] what they're supposed to do. What is their role? What is their responsibility? How are they going to communicate what they're doing to improve the system and really achieving this coordinated way of providing services to Veterans?

Shawn Liu: That was really helpful. And I imagine for folks who, again, who probably heard that for the first time is, "Yeah, that's obvious. Why would you not coordinate?" And so kind of like a little history lesson, especially for the other programs and services and interventions that we're going to hear more about as this episode progresses.

When homeless services, whether or not they're for Veterans, but when homeless services really started to prop up throughout the country, you think in the 80s and in the 90s, right? So we're talking about like 30, 40 years ago. It was very decentralized. There were a lot of different organizations, a lot of different programs that were doing things. And they were all doing a lot of great work. A lot of great work was done. But the scope of the work was done just as that organization, that non profit organization, that government entity, just in the scope of their work. And so [00:04:00] they evaluated stuff in terms of their work, how many people did they serve, what were the success outcomes for their program.

What that also meant for people who needed those services, it was kind of a little bit of a maze or like a labyrinth, like how would you figure out to get all of the different services in a community? And what would often happen is they would show up to maybe one non profit's door, one organization's door, and that organization would take a look at that person, see if their needs fit with the type of services and programming that organization offered, and they decided, "Oh, would you be a good fit for this program or not?"

What also resulted is that if that party or organization didn't have other types of services that participant needed, right? So we had to have all these different resource guides and then meetings to try to figure out who were the other resources in the community so they can make all the referrals to.

That's a lot of extra work just to figure out the full range of services that a person needs.

And what you're describing here, Jill, what I heard from you is an acknowledgement that's a very inefficient way of doing things, and that if we as system [00:05:00] providers, as service providers, coordinated with each other better, acknowledging that our programs and services can't do everything for everybody, but as a network, as a system, working interconnectedly, we could potentially provide many, most, if not all of the services that individual Veterans needs.

And I probably answered this question for you, but, from your perspective though, does that ring true? Why is One Team critical for our work to ending Veteran homelessness?

Jill Albanese: I think the most important piece of this is that this is better for the Veteran. This is providing better, more comprehensive services for the Veterans to help get them housed and to keep them housed. One of the things

about the One Team approach is that, to your point, we consider all potential options and resources to support the Veteran.

We don't say, oh, I provide transitional housing. This Veteran needs supportive housing, I'm going to turn them away. We really look at a No Wrong Door approach, as you mentioned. So anywhere within the system that a Veteran connects with either VA or with our community partners, we want to make [00:06:00] sure that we are helping that Veteran quickly and getting the Veteran the most appropriate service that's needed.

One of the other things that we do with the One Team approach is we that we recognize the strengths and expertise of each of our programs, and we recognize that sometimes, even if we have staffing shortages, or maybe even if we have staff that aren't trained in one area, for example, not everybody is trained and good at housing placement, housing search, not everybody's good at landlord engagement. But we have enough resources within the Homeless Programs Office and with our community partners that we can partner with somebody to do, landlord engagement. We can partner with somebody to do outreach. We shouldn't be doing everything on our own.

When I look at some of our programs, some of them are trying to do everything themselves. Some of them are working in silos. And we just have to stop that. We have the resources that we need to house the Veterans and to keep them housed. We just need to work together in a more efficient [00:07:00] way and in a more coordinated way to make sure that Veterans are getting housed quickly and to make sure that Veterans are not falling back into homelessness.

Shawn Liu: Yeah. And those are really, really great points. What I heard from you, Jill, is that, we have to take this historically decentralized patchwork of different programs, services, and organizations, and literally, as it says on the tin, as the name says, work together as one team for the Veterans.

Jill, this has been a fantastic intro to the intro. In a moment, we're gonna hear about more programs and services, and we're also gonna be thinking about the different interventions that we're about to hear, how they interlock together as one team in your communities.

But because whole series is just a little bite sized, it's only the beginning, where can folks learn more about the One Team approach?

Jill Albanese: You can go to our website. We have an amazing One Team Toolkit that we have published, that is available to our VA staff, as well as folks who are just interested in looking at it.

Shawn Liu: We're going to put a link to the One Team Implementation Toolkit landing page. We're going to update this [00:08:00] very frequently, so keep the landing page bookmarked. Check back regularly because when we update it, it's going to have the latest and greatest learnings and best practices throughout the country.

Jill, this has been fantastic. Thank you so much.

Jill Albanese is the Senior Advisor to the Executive Director and Director of Clinical Operations here in the Homeless Programs Office.

My friend, thank you so much for being here again today.

Jill Albanese: Thanks, Shawn. Great to be here.

Shawn Liu: Next up we have Molly Batschelet she is the National Program Coordinator for Coordinated Entry systems integration here in the Homeless Programs Office.

Molly, thanks so much for joining us today.

Molly Batschelet: Thank you so much for having me, Shawn.

Shawn Liu: Yeah. So we just heard from Jill Albanese about our One Team approach, which is starting to be one of our new undergirding, foundational philosophies or principles in how we do the work to end veteran homelessness. And the way I think of in my head coordinated entry, this concept of figuring out how to better coordinate with all of the different programs and services to get better as access is really important and actually dovetails nicely into One Team. However they are technically different concepts. And so I'm [00:09:00] really glad to have you on today as part of this series.

Can you tell us a little bit about what coordinated entry is as a concept?

Molly Batschelet: Coordinated entry is a system that provides a single entry point for people experiencing homelessness or those that are at risk. And this is to connect them to housing and other resources to end or prevent their homelessness.

You might ask, "What exactly does that mean?" Before coordinated entry, someone experiencing a housing crisis would have to contact multiple agencies to try and find help.

This could be extremely overwhelming, it was an ineffective process. I'd like to use an example of a Veteran who fell behind on their rent after being laid off. They didn't know what prevention resources existed or how to access them, and ultimately they lost their housing.

Now they're experiencing homelessness and trying to navigate an unfamiliar and disjointed system. They didn't know where to start, they didn't know who to call, or what they qualified for. They would make call after call, showing up to multiple agencies. Some agencies they couldn't reach, some weren't taking referral, some programs they were told they didn't qualify for. But these [00:10:00] agencies weren't really talking to each other, and the burden was on that Veteran to figure this all out.

And I do want to point out that navigating multiple resources can be very complicated, even for a trained case manager.

Imagine if you're this Veteran experiencing an active housing crisis, which is a trauma in itself, dealing with other life stressors, maybe you have barriers such as lack of transportation or don't have a phone that's working, all while trying to figure out this housing system. Coordinated entry eliminates the need for somebody to go from agency to agency to sign up for services. Instead, you can go to any agency that uses coordinated entry and get connected to every agency that uses it at the same time. And there are also some mechanisms in place to track individuals progress toward housing and services, reducing opportunities for someone to get lost in the system.

Shawn Liu: That was a really great example of just how, if you're facing homelessness, which to be clear is a crisis in and of itself. But when you're actively managing that crisis, it's tough enough on its own. And then trying to figure out the [00:11:00] labyrinthine patchwork of all of the different programs and services that can be challenging on top of the actual crisis of being homeless.

And what I heard from you is this concept of that we, as service providers are trying to take the burden of figuring out the maze off the Veteran and put that on us. So all they need to do is find one of our many access points in any given community. And we'll take them from there.

Molly Batschelet: Absolutely. That's exactly it.

Shawn Liu: Molly building upon our One Team approach. I've seen a lot of overlap between coordinated entry principles, philosophies, and maybe even like activities with our One Team approach.

From your perspective, does that ring true for you? In your view, how does One Team fit in with coordinated entry?

Molly Batschelet: I believe that one team and coordinated entry are essentially synonymous. A One Team approach also refers to coordinated, united actions and interconnectivity among programs with the joint mission to end Veteran homelessness. And just like coordinated entry, a One Team Approach uses the Housing First principles and provides Veterans, regardless of their point of [00:12:00] entry, with a coordinated process that develops a holistic, tailored housing and service plan that's centered on that Veteran's choice.

Shawn Liu: Yeah. So what I'm hearing is they're like coordinated entry and our One Team approach that we heard from Jill Albanese, they're basically two sides of the same coin they're getting at similar things, maybe from subtly different angles, but they're ultimately the same thing. How do we best coordinate with each other as service providers to make access to services easier and dare I say, more accessible for Veterans.

Molly, I know this probably kind of goes without saying, but to really tie this into a bow, why are things like coordinated entry systems and processes important to ending veteran homelessness?

Molly Batschelet: I think first it streamlines access to housing options for those individuals and families experiencing homelessness or those at risk in a given geographic region.

It's also about equity. Coordinated entry ensures that all people experiencing a housing crisis have fair and equal access to the community's housing and homeless assistance resources. It also helps communities prioritize [00:13:00] people who are most in need of assistance. For example, those that have high vulnerabilities and those that are living unsheltered.

Shawn Liu: Excellent stuff.

Molly, before we let you go, where can folks learn more about coordinated entry? If they're curious about getting more information into the specifics or the concrete ways to implement it in their communities?

Molly Batschelet: To learn more we'll share some links from the VA Coordinated Entry Fact Sheet, United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. And you can also research your local Continuum of Care for more information on your area's coordinated entry process.

Shawn Liu: Excellent. We're going to put links to all of that into the description so you can check it out.

Molly Batschelet is the National Program Coordinator for Coordinated Entry Systems Integration here in the Homeless Programs Office.

Molly, thanks so much for being here with us today.

Molly Batschelet: Thank you for having me, Shawn.

Shawn Liu: Next up, to kick us off with a review of the different interventions that VA has, I'm excited to have Allison Bond, the Acting National Director for, Healthcare for Homeless Veterans, and Sean Clark, the National [00:14:00] Director of Veterans Justice Programs, to talk about outreach services.

Allison, Sean, thanks so much for being here with us today.

Allison Bond: Thank you for having me.

Sean Clark: Thank you, Shawn. Glad to be here.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, alright. Outreach, essentially the front door to VA homeless programs and services. But also for many Veterans, outreach serves as the front door to basically almost all services: the Veterans Health Administration, the Veterans Benefits Administration, other mainstream programs and services that don't even have anything to do with VA. Outreach often serves that front door.

Allison, to kick us off in this section, what is outreach as a concept, and why is it so important for the work to end Veteran homelessness?

Allison Bond: In the most basic of terms, outreach is the act of reaching out to others who might not otherwise have easy access to services, and then providing them with support and services that they may need. And really, it's important because outreach is typically the first encounter our teams have with Veterans, and our first opportunity to start [00:15:00] engagement and start building rapport with Veterans, and then connecting them with care.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, and I imagine it's critical as well because, it's literally, as the word says, us going out into the world to reach people with the goal to bring them in. And I imagine many Veterans, and we hear this a lot in VA, number one, especially if they're women or if they're younger, they don't think of themselves as Veterans, and thus, number two, don't realize that they're eligible for a whole bunch of benefits and services that they actually are.

And so if we at VA just wait around for them to come to us, nobody's getting helped. We're not providing services, and they're not getting the care. So we've got to actually do the physical outreach to go find them wherever they are.

And ours is a little bit unique, because we have two programs here. We have your program, Healthcare for Homeless Veterans, but also Sean, your program, Veterans Justice Programs, that actually have not just staff, but clinical staff who are doing this outreach work in terms of a healthcare sort of bent.

So Allison, can you share a little bit about your program, Healthcare for Homeless [00:16:00] Veterans and how it provides outreach?

Allison Bond: Sure. HCHV teams are comprised of social workers, peer support specialists, nurses, and other team members, and they provide different types of outreach. And this includes direct outreach, which is where we do most of our work, indirect outreach, and this might be an example would be through advertising, like through our National Call Center for Homeless Veterans hotline, and then also through participating in events, community events like stand downs.

Shawn Liu: And so, Sean, I've also asked you to join us here as well, because your program, Veterans Justice Programs, you do outreach too. So can you tell a little bit about the outreach that VJP does?

Sean Clark: Absolutely, and so our staff in Veterans Justice Programs are also clinical, much as is true in HCHV. We have Veterans Justice Programs Specialists, VJP Specialists, the majority of them are social workers. And we also have VJP Peer Specialists, which we're very excited about. This is a

relatively recent and a growing part of our workforce. It's about 10% of the VJP frontline staff we have across the [00:17:00] country.

These folks are going into criminal justice settings, state and federal prisons, local jails, working in Veterans treatment courts, working with local law enforcement agencies, as well as with VA police partners to help get Veterans into VA services at the earliest possible point. When Veterans are actively incarcerated, that earliest possible point comes after the time that they're released. But for Veterans who aren't currently incarcerated, who may have some other form of justice involvement, their eligibility for VA healthcare isn't affected by that. And so, we're able to help them access VA care and services, again, as quickly as possible when they're out in the community. And that of course, is the

Track 1: Yeah,

Shawn Liu: Yeah, that is really helpful.

So Sean, I want to stay with you for a little bit and ask what may feel like a silly or stupid question. This is a series, we're closing this out on this episode, Introduction to Veteran Homelessness, and we're focused on homelessness. And so outreach from Healthcare for Homeless Veterans to places like encampments or shelters or soup kitchens, that makes sense to me.

But help me out. Why are we actually doing outreach to jails and prisons in the context of homeless services?

Sean Clark: Sure thing. [00:18:00] It's a critical place for us to be doing this outreach given our goal of ending homelessness among Veterans. We want to be reaching Veterans who have contact with the criminal justice system because that's the most powerful predictor of homelessness that there is.

That really astonished me the first time that I heard it. I would have guessed something else, probably something clinical, mental health issues, substance use disorder, for example. But incarceration is the most powerful predictor that there is.

The link between those experiences has demonstrated to be very powerful and it's bi directional. So it's often the case that folks move back and forth between homelessness or imminent risk of housing loss, very unstable housing and contact with the criminal justice system. That can look several different ways.

In doing this work, not every Veteran who we run into in a criminal justice setting is homeless today or is at imminent risk. But it's the fact of their contact with the criminal justice system that is going to create that risk for them in the future. And if we can interrupt that cycle, if we can deliver services sooner rather than later, those can build up protective factors for those Veterans that will help prevent that outcome in [00:19:00] the future.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, that makes a ton of sense. And in many ways, it sounds like because of those risk factors, and you mentioned the kind of the bidirectional nature that in some instances, we're being proactive, outreaching to Veterans in jails and prisons, in case they may end up being homeless in the future, but also working with Veterans in jails and prisons, because they may actually be homeless upon exit, or how the history of homelessness and that history may have contributed to why they're currently incarcerated.

This has been fantastic. Really appreciate you both being on this episode today.

For folks who are curious, who want to know more, Allison, I want to come back to you. Where can folks learn more about outreach, Health Care for Homeless Veterans, and for those Veterans out there, how to actually get connected to resources?

Allison Bond: Sure. So we'll include a link to HCHV homepage, which includes all information about our programs and then also include a link for stand down events that are coming up. So if you'd like to get involved and volunteer, this is a great way to find out what events might be coming up in your community.

Shawn Liu: Yeah. Outstanding. Outstanding.

Sean Clark, same question. How can folks learn more about Veterans Justice [00:20:00] Programs?

Sean Clark: And a similar answer, our website is the best place to start. And for every medical center across the country, we include the contact information for VJP specialists. You can contact them directly from our website. This is important because we want Veterans who may be facing some kind of justice involvement, but their family members, loved ones, folks concerned about a Veteran with justice involvement to be able to reach out and make contact and see what may be possible through VA.

Shawn Liu: Sean Clark is the National Director of Veterans Justice Programs, and Allison Bond is the Acting National Director for Healthcare for Homeless Veterans.

Allison, Shawn, thank you so much for your time and being here with us today.

Sean Clark: Thank you, Shawn.

Shawn Liu: Joining us next is Adrienne Nash-Melendez. She is the National Director of the Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program. Adrienne, thanks so much for joining us today.

Adrienne Nash-Melendez: Oh, thanks, Shawn. Happy to be here.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, okay. We just heard about outreach, which serves as the front door for our homeless programs and services, and you're going to help continue us into this sort of oasis of the different interventions that we [00:21:00] have. And I want to start my conversation with you talking about homeless prevention, which is a really important intervention for us, because all things being equal, if we can stop Veterans from becoming homeless in the first place, great. Like, we don't like, we're done. Like, we're, we just support them there and then good. And we avoid so much extra traumatization and disruption and chaos in the Veterans lives if we can just stop it there.

But I know I'm probably being a bit too I guess the word I want to say is simple with this concept. So tell us from your perspective, what is homeless prevention? How does this intervention fit into the full array of the homeless programs and services that a community may have?

Adrienne Nash-Melendez: Yeah, sure. Thanks, Shawn. So I think homelessness prevention, when we're thinking about it, it is the prevention of homelessness, right? So it's a little bit different than eviction prevention. I think sometimes words get used interchangeably, and so I just want to be clear on that. It's a tad bit closer to potentially having to be an emergency shelter. Normally for [00:22:00] SSVF prevention, it's that someone would lose their housing and become literally homeless in the next 30 days or so.

In terms of how homelessness prevention works, SSVF has been doing homeless prevention since 2011 so it is part of the work of what we have been learning over the last 12 to 13 years.

And I would say it is not a perfect science, so I want to fully note that we continue to learn every single day. But our goal is to help families or individual Veterans be able to either maintain the housing that they currently have, and that can look a little different depending on the situation, or to be able to provide some solutions along with a Veteran.

And so sometimes that looks like rental assistance. Maybe someone is in arrears and they need some extra support. And so we help with financial assistance, but then we also help with supports related to maybe increasing income or supporting the family in other ways.

And then sometimes it also looks a little bit closer to emergency shelter, and this is where our rapid resolution conversations come [00:23:00] into play. So maybe an individual was staying with family and some things fell apart or it just wasn't going well. There was some conflict. Being able to talk with the Veteran, helping them to feel empowered to look at options and strengths. And sometimes we're able to explore that and find an option that could be temporary, but can support the Veteran in that moment so they don't have to enter shelter.

I think that's really important, especially for families with children. We're really trying to support folks before they have to be in that space.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, that's really helpful insight. And what I heard most importantly, I think for the concept of folks trying to grapple with the experience of homelessness and when Veterans fall into homelessness, you've really described a level of granularity that adds more complexity or mile markers, I don't know what we want to call it. That it's not just not homeless and homeless. That there is your own place, and then you're at risk of eviction and you may get evicted.

But you've raised a really important point, and this is something that I know a lot of smart people have tried to better understand, but have difficulty [00:24:00] doing so, is understanding how many evictions later lead to those people becoming homeless. Like if I was renting and I got evicted, there's a good chance I won't become homeless because my network, my mom, my dad, my sister, my brother, my friends, they have resources that they can float me, I can stay with them for a little bit. And while I may be couch surfing, I will probably not have to go under the bridge or in an encampment.

And what you've also raised is that, even after eviction and being precariously housed, unstably housed, there's a lot of terms that I know that our system uses, that a person, a family, they can exhaust all of those different resources, and

when they're finally at the cusp of knocking on a shelter door, or maybe, unfortunately, finding themselves out to the elements, in encampments, under bridges, that's where your program, Supportive Services for Veteran Families, or SSVF, can come in and intervene.

I also want to acknowledge that SSVF, is basically our primary intervention for prevention in the Homeless Programs Office. And I know [00:25:00] we're going to have a lot of other experts later on in this episode talk about some of the other different interventions. They all work with Veterans who are actually homeless now, and then get them on that path to permanent housing, but SSVF is largely it for us when it comes to prevention.

In contrast to what we just heard in terms of outreach and what we will hear from many of our other programs, SSVF is not staffed by VA employees, that your program actually awards grants to non profit social service organizations in your communities all across the country. And it's those non profit staff that really actually do the work. And in many ways, because of this kind of grant award to non profits, those organizations serve as force multipliers, that they expand our capacity and expand our reach.

And the added benefit, because they are so integrated with other community organizations, even if a Veteran shows up at their door and says, I need help, and they may or may not be able to help them with the SSVF program, they're probably very well skilled and [00:26:00] knowledgeable that they can link them with all the other things that they're eligible for in their community.

Adrienne, sit tight. We're going to have you back on a little bit later to talk about the permanent housing aspect of your program.

Joining us next to learn more about different interim housing settings, we have Marzena Guzik, National Coordinator for Contract and Residential Services here in the Homeless Programs Office.

Marz, thanks so much for joining us today.

Marzena Guzik: Shawn, thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate what you do.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, okay. We're starting to get into the different models that provide direct services to Veterans.

We just heard about our outreach services, but when Veterans are identified in outreach and they don't have a place to go, they're out in the elements, different interim beds is important. It gives people a place to stay right now so that they're out of the elements.

And your program actually provides a couple different variants of this. The most common one that people are probably familiar with when they think about homelessness is emergency shelters. So from your perspective, what is emergency shelter?

Marzena Guzik: Sure, in simple terms, [00:27:00] emergency shelter is a place where Veterans experiencing homelessness can go for immediate and safe place to stay. Once that's in place, the next task is to focus on assessment and linkage to a wide network of services.

VA recognizes that even one night spent in a place not meant for human habitation can create significant risks to Veterans safety as well as physical and emotional well being. And for this reason, we have put special emphasis on making sure that Veterans can receive same-day access to shelter and services in over 270 HCHV CRS locations nationwide.

The important part is to remember that CRS providers cannot contract for shelter alone, and this means that once the Veteran has a safe place to stay, the task is to determine what type of services are needed in order to assist the Veteran on their way to permanent housing?

The services can include access to the largest [00:28:00] network of mental health providers in the world, substance use recovery services, vocational rehabilitation, medical services, assessment of benefits, and whatever else is needed to remove barriers and build support systems for the Veterans to succeed.

Currently over 60% of Veterans who enter our programs achieve the goal of stable permanent housing in an average of 87 days, while the remaining 40% need ongoing services to ensure positive outcomes.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, that's really helpful context. So what I heard is that, we provide emergency shelter, but critically for your program, it's not just the bed, like we're not just putting Veterans into beds and saying, "Peace out." We're actually providing them with other supportive services to keep them going on their housing journey, which is really important.

Mars, I get the impression, or I think if I remember correctly, emergency shelter or the different types of programs and services that your program provides, takes a couple different forms, a couple different variants. And one of [00:29:00] them I think is really important to mention is this concept of safe haven.

Now I'm obviously not an expert on it, but my understanding is that it provides some really valuable access to shelter beds for certain populations. Can you tell us a little bit about what safe havens are?

Marzena Guzik: Absolutely. A Safe Haven is a community based early recovery residential program where the emphasis is really on meeting homeless Veterans where they're at without any prerequisites. So you may be wondering, "Okay, what does that really mean? Why is it important?"

These programs are really critical because they serve hard to reach and often hard to engage Veterans who struggle with severe mental illness, substance use disorders, and have a really hard time functioning in a traditional shelter environment.

Safe havens do not mandate sobriety as a condition of admission. These programs also do not mandate compliance with any specific treatment programs. The demands tend to be kept to a very minimum. And the environment tends to be as non [00:30:00] invasive as possible.

Safe haven programs do have rules, and those rules focus on staff and Veteran safety, honesty, and encouraging wraparound services.

Safe havens are incredibly important because some homeless individuals cannot or will not be able to attain sobriety or be ready to adhere to substance use or mental health care right away. However, these individuals can be successfully housed and gradually engage in wraparound services that will help to end their homelessness.

HCHV currently offers low demand safe havens in 24 locations nationally.

Shawn Liu: Awesome. That's really helpful. And what I heard, and it's something that makes my heart sing if I can, be excited about a program model, was the way that it provides services in, what feels like a very compassionate yet pragmatic way. I think one of the most heartbreaking things is for a Veteran to not be able to get out of the elements, get out of the heat or the cold, because they're still on the early parts [00:31:00] of their mental health or substance

recovery journey. And what I heard from you was that safe havens really try to work to accommodate them as best as possible so that we can keep them literally safe, and engender trust, will, motivation to keep on that path to recovery, however it's going to be for that specific Veteran.

Mars, I know that there's another model that you've been a big champion of over the last year or so since joining the Healthcare for Homeless Veterans team and that's medical respite, which just thinking ahead from the name of the title, it probably adds a medical component to all of the different shelter stuff that we've been talking about.

So from your perspective, what is medical respite?

Marzena Guzik: Great question. Some Veterans experiencing homelessness also struggle with illness or are too frail to recover from injury in a traditional shelter setting. And this is why medical respite allows those individuals to rest, recover, and heal in a safe environment while accessing medical care and other supportive services.

[00:32:00] One unfortunate and sad example I can think of is a situation where a Veteran who is homeless leaves the hospital with the need for oxygen therapy or medical devices. Sadly, most shelters cannot accommodate people who are on oxygen or require plugins for medical devices, which leaves that individual in a really heartbreaking situation. And this is exactly where medical respite comes in.

Currently, HCHV offers medical respite programs in 17 strategically chosen communities nationwide. And these communities can custom design the level of care and services offered in their medical respite programs based on the unique needs of Veterans in their community. We realize that the need for these services is growing and we plan to expand this program to more locations in the near future.

Shawn Liu: Excellent. That's really helpful stuff. And what I love about it, and I'm going to soapbox for half a second.

Earlier in my career, when I had provided direct services in HUD-VASH, one of the things that felt [00:33:00] maddening to me, and I know it felt maddening to a lot of folks, including the Veterans caught in the situation, was that when you had Veterans leaving hospital ERs, and they had a lot of medical needs coming out, you're right, a lot of shelters, a lot of programs are nervous because they don't have nurses on staff, they don't have medical providers on staff, and

they're like, "Oh well, this person has too many needs, we can't help them." But if everybody, every provider in a community says the same thing, what's the alternative? That the Veteran is out on the streets. You're telling me that being out on the streets is safer than being in these other settings?

And so what I love and just admire about your work to champion medical respite is to create more access to these resources so that Veterans who are coming out of hospitals with you know, a lot of medical needs, aren't forced for whatever reason to be out in the elements.

Mars, this has been really helpful. And everything that you've said has made the case about why these programs and services are critical for our work to end Veteran homelessness. But just to really put a neon sign on it, shine a spotlight on it, in your opinion, why are all these programs and services important to [00:34:00] end Veteran homelessness?

Marzena Guzik: Shawn, HCHV believes that in order to end Veteran homelessness, we need the ability to first reach and effectively engage Veterans experiencing homelessness. Once that happens, we truly need to meet people where they're at. Offer immediate and safe place to stay and then surround those Veterans with targeted wraparound services that will help to reduce barriers to housing and enhance protective factors.

What is unique about the HCHV CRS program is that it allows communities to custom design their programs based on the unique needs of the Veterans in their community.

Shawn Liu: Outstanding. This has all been amazing, helpful stuff. Mars, before we let you go, where can folks learn more?

Marzena Guzik: For general information, simply type in HCHV in your browser and you will see our VA page with access to quick fact sheet.

It's really important to note that beyond HCHV, the VA offers a wide variety of short and long term programs, and the best way to explore [00:35:00] those is to sit down and chat with one of our licensed clinical social workers at your local VA to determine which program is best equipped to serve you. If you represent a local nonprofit organization and you're interested in contracting with the VA, please visit SAM.gov. That's S A M dot G O V for local contracting opportunities.

Shawn Liu: Outstanding. We're gonna put links to all of those into the description of this episode.

Marzena Guzik is the National Program Manager for Healthcare for Homeless Veterans Contracted Residential Services here in the Homeless Programs Office. Mars, thanks so much for the gift of your time.

Marzena Guzik: Thank you so much for having me.

Shawn Liu: Joining us next to learn more about transitional housing as a residential service that VA provides is Chelsea Watson, National Director for VA's Grant and Per Diem Program.

Chelsea, thanks so much for being here with us today.

Chelsea Watson: Thanks, Shawn, for having me.

Shawn Liu: Yeah. so we just learned about emergency shelters, which is kind of a category, loosely defined, it's a term that I've been using, just like [00:36:00] temporary housing. And in homeless services, temporary housing takes on a couple different forms that are informed by length of time, maybe case management, or service delivery, or other types of programming that a participant may be able to participate in. We just heard about emergency shelters and how VA provides those.

Next, I want to hear a little bit about transitional housing, which has been one of the older models, not only in VA homeless program services, but in the broader continuum of all homeless services.

So before we hear about your program, Chelsea, can you share a little bit about what transitional housing is as an intervention?

Chelsea Watson: Yes, transitional housing is an interim housing resource to support individuals who are homeless or at risk for homelessness, providing them with safe, stable place to live. Oftentimes, these programs provide an array of supportive services aimed at facilitating housing stabilization and income maximization.

Transitional housing is [00:37:00] temporary and is intended to create a path for individuals to secure permanent housing.

Shawn Liu: Awesome. Yeah. So that's pretty straightforward. And you mentioned a term, income maximization. That might be a little bit new to folks. Hold onto your hat. Later in this episode, we're gonna hear from Dr. Carma Heitzmann, who's gonna talk to us all about employment, and she's gonna touch on income maximization.

Chelsea, the way we provide transitional housing is through your program, Grant and Per Diem. But I also know that Grant Per Diem does a lot more than just transitional housing.

Can you tell us a little bit about what Grant and Per Diem is, and all the different services, both transitional housing and the more that it provides?

Chelsea Watson: Sure. VA's Grant and per Diem program has served as a transitional housing resource for Veterans experiencing homelessness for the past 30 years. Right now, we have partnerships with about 400 community based organizations providing transitional housing with a variety of wraparound supportive services.

So our grantees really aim to meet [00:38:00] Veterans where they're at, work to understand their goals, and assist them with accessing the resources needed to support them on their path to securing permanent housing. The specific services offered by each grantee differ, but generally speaking, these grantees will provide case management services, assist Veterans with getting connected to VA medical and mental health care services if they're not already. Many times grantees provide life skills training, employment assistance, and help Veterans access VA and Social Security benefits that they may be entitled to.

With VA's transitional housing programs, our goal is to provide same day access to our housing. Being unsheltered is an emergent situation. We want to act quickly and engage Veterans with safe housing and services.

And like you said, Grant and Per Diem is a lot more than just transitional housing. This program has evolved quite a [00:39:00] bit over the past 30 years. We're currently authorized to award grants under five different kinds of programs, including transitional housing, walk in service centers, case management grants to support our permanent housing retention efforts, and even capital grants to construct new or improve existing facilities. All of these different grant types are intended to ensure that communities have the resources that they need to meet the diverse needs of Veterans.

Shawn Liu: So Chelsea, this all makes sense. And I know it goes without saying that, folks need places to stay while they're on their journey to housing. But to help us really conceptualize this, why are programs like Grant and Per Diem and interventions like transitional housing important to ending Veteran homelessness?

Chelsea Watson: Currently many communities have insufficient levels of affordable permanent housing. So transitional housing is a really effective approach to engaging [00:40:00] unsheltered Veterans with safe housing and services the same day that they're identified. Keeping Veterans engaged in services is an important step to helping them secure permanent housing and to ending Veteran homelessness.

Shawn Liu: That was really helpful. Chelsea, before we let you go I know for Veterans, if there's a Veteran who's listening into this and they think, "Oh, wait Grant and Per Diem might be right for me." The best way for them to get connected is our call center. 877-424-3838. But for both Veterans who are interested and maybe just folks in the general public, maybe they're a potential nonprofit who may want to provide grant and per diem services in the future.

How can folks learn more about your program?

Chelsea Watson: If you're a service, a community service provider and would like to learn more about opportunities to collaborate with VA or learn more about the Grant and Per Diem program, you can visit us at [00:41:00] www.va.gov/homeless/gpd.asp.

Shawn Liu: Excellent. We're going to put that link into the description of this episode so you can click on it right from your podcast feed. It'll take you over the GPD website. Chelsea, thank you so much for being here with us today.

Chelsea Watson: Thank you for having me.

Shawn Liu: Back again with us as Adrienne Nash-Melendez from the Supportive Services for Veteran Families program. to talk a little bit more about her permanent housing components.

Adrienne, you have another intervention as part of your program that is rapid rehousing, and this is for Veterans who are now homeless, we haven't been able to prevent. They're homeless now, they may be in a shelter, they may be on the streets, and our goal is, as the title of the intervention goes, rapidly rehouse

them, getting them back into a permanent housing place, usually an apartment and sometimes with a little bit of a subsidy that makes rent affordable.

I probably butchered that definition of rapid rehousing.

Tell us from your vantage point, what is rapid rehousing as an intervention, and how does your program, SSVF, provide it?

Adrienne Nash-Melendez: Yeah I get really jazzed about the work that we do with Rapid Rehousing because I think that It's something that's really critical in the [00:42:00] continuum of all of the services that we have in communities.

Rapid Rehousing is working with a Veteran or a Veteran family, they are literally homeless, so like you said, they might be in an emergency shelter, they might be in a place not meant for human habitation., and it's really talking with them about their housing goals, what they're hoping for, what they're looking for, and then helping them to get into permanent housing. And I think the word rapid, it makes it sound very quick. Sometimes that is like a couple of days, which is pretty awesome.

And then sometimes it's a little bit longer, I think, with the housing market. You're working through some of those challenges, but this is where landlords and other partners can be super helpful. So it's getting folks into permanent housing with no preconditions. You don't have to be sober. You don't have to do X, Y, and Z. Your children don't have to be quiet. Like all these things. It's like getting people into permanent housing.

And then it's services around the household. So services are happening while they're looking for housing or while the case manager is working with them, but then it's also thinking about things that will help the person or the family to continue to stay in housing. So [00:43:00] maybe a family needs some extra support with child care. Maybe they're not sure how to navigate like a subsidized child care application and they need some immediate support now. SSVF has some temporary financial assistance that could help with that and bridge until maybe they were able to access other resources.

And so it's really, talking with a Veteran, talking about their goals and helping them to create this network basically of support and resources so that they can continue in their housing.

Shawn Liu: Awesome, awesome. Okay before we let you go, Adrienne, I got two questions. The first is, you know, and we've been making the business case

for all of this stuff, why they're important throughout our talk together. But, just to put a big spotlight on it, why are interventions like prevention and rapid rehousing so critical to the work to end Veteran homelessness?

Adrienne Nash-Melendez: One resource isn't going to solve all of the things. And so we really have to have a collective with VA and homeless programs.

These interventions are important because we need a bunch of different options. Every Veteran and Veteran family has their own individualized needs, and it's really important for us [00:44:00] to respect and understand that and to be able to work from that context. And we also know that one thing isn't going to fix everything, too. So sometimes it might be having a rapid resolution conversation with SSVF and being able to stay with a friend for a little bit longer, but knowing that there is more on that permanent housing pathway. And so it might be bringing in another partner from VA or the community to continue the work together.

And then lastly, I think we have to have options at the front door of emergency shelters, and we have to be able to also have permanent housing resources, too. And I appreciate so much that SSVF grantees really think about prevention intentionally in their communities. And I'm really looking forward to the work that we can do to continue to learn and expand that resource.

Shawn Liu: Outstanding. Adrienne, before we let you go, where can folks learn more about homeless prevention, rapid rehousing, and Supportive Services for Veteran families?

Adrienne Nash-Melendez: So we have an SSVF website which I know we'll put the link to, and then on the right hand side of that page, you'll it's the third box down. I'm sorry, this is a little complicated. It says Explore [00:45:00] the Directory and it has our SSVF grantees, so if you're looking for an SSVF grantee in your community, I am pretty sure that there will be one and you just click on it and it has more information like how to contact them by phone or email most also have websites where you can find out a little bit more. And then of course, like if you were really stuck and you're not exactly sure where to go you're always welcome to email SSVF@va.gov and we'll try to get you connected.

Shawn Liu: Excellent. Thanks so much. This is fantastic. We're going to put links to all of those in the description of this episode.

Adrienne Nash-Melendez is the National Director for the Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program here in the Homeless Programs Office.

Adrienne, my friend, thank you so much for the gift of your time and being here today.

Adrienne Nash-Melendez: Thanks, Shawn.

Shawn Liu: Next up, we have Meghan Deal, National Director for the Housing and Urban Development, VA Supportive Housing, or HUD-VASH program to tell us a little bit about permanent supportive housing.

Meghan, thanks so much for joining us.

Meghan Deal: Happy to be here, Shawn.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, so we just heard about rapid rehousing as one of our two main permanent [00:46:00] housing interventions. Permanent supported housing is a little bit older in terms of a model, and it's a little bit more robust.

For folks who may be hearing this for the first time, what exactly is permanent supportive housing as a category of intervention in our services?

Meghan Deal: Permanent supported housing is a model, like you said, that's quite robust. It combines a rental subsidy in some form, so a way that people get their housing paid for or a portion of their housing paid for with supportive services. And those supportive services can look very different depending on the needs of the individual. But typically they include access to mental health care, other behavioral health care services, and physical or health care services like primary care or specialty care services.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, and my understanding historically is that it originally arose from a need to provide a subset of people experiencing homelessness way more services in a permanent housing setting, [00:47:00] acknowledging that not every homeless person has the same needs. Some need lighter touch services and a little bit of support. Some have very extensive needs, whether they be from physical disabilities, mental health issues, substance addiction, and thus need more and more support. And permanent supportive housing, my understanding, fits that role of the more intensive offering that a community may have.

Meghan Deal: That's exactly right. You just pointed out a really important fact, which is that Individuals who experience homelessness are a broad range of individuals with a broad range of needs. Not everybody needs the same thing, and permanent supportive housing was really designed for those individuals who needed the most significant support. Maybe had experienced homelessness for an extensive period of time, or like you noted, had multiple additional barriers and challenges that are facing and in order to get the housing and then maintain that housing over time, were identified as needing ongoing, longer term support.

Shawn Liu: And you're the National Director of the HUD-VASH [00:48:00] program. So it's basically VA's version of this type of intervention. VA's take on permanent supportive housing. And my understanding is HUD-VASH is actually the largest single permanent supported housing program in the country. We have a lot of resources and a lot of staff.

So can you tell us a little bit about what HUD-VASH is and how it's been basically VA's take on permanent supported housing?

Meghan Deal: Yeah, absolutely. HUD-VASH like you said, it's the largest permanent supportive housing program in the country. It's a partnership between VA and HUD, Housing and Urban Development, where HUD provides the rental subsidy part of the permanent supportive housing. That's in the form of Housing Choice Vouchers, which is otherwise known as Section 8 to a lot of folks.

HUD provides those housing vouchers. And then VA comes alongside those Veterans, those individuals, with a housing voucher and provides the supportive services part of the program. We often refer to that as in quotes as case management, but it's really broader than what a lot of folks think of when they think of case management. It's the help that [00:49:00] an individual needs to get access to housing, but it's also the ongoing medical and mental health support and linkages to other services in particular, all the services that are offered through the VA healthcare system to help those Veterans stay in housing over time.

Shawn Liu: Now, this probably goes without saying, but I'm going to head, it's probably like a no brainer question, but I'm going to ask it anyway. Why are interventions like HUD-VASH important to the work to end Veteran homelessness?

Meghan Deal: I really think that goes back to your original question and the point you made about the more robust services, the more comprehensive services being offered through HUD-VASH as opposed to some other interventions we have for homeless individuals.

HUD-VASH provides a more intensive level of support for individuals who need that support. The other thing about HUD-VASH is that it's longitudinal. It isn't time based. For all of us, our needs change over time. So somebody may need a certain level of support and then they're doing great. For a while, they don't need that at all, but then they might need it again. So HUD-VASH provides [00:50:00] that support long term for as long as a Veteran may need it. They can move on, they can be independent, or they can continue to access the support offered through HUD-VASH, and that's really unique in the program amongst our homeless intervention services.

Shawn Liu: Meghan, before we let you go, where can folks learn more about HUD-VASH?

Meghan Deal: Shawn, I know you're going to drop a link into the description of the podcast.

Shawn Liu: Yep. Yeah. You're going to get a link. It'll take you right to our HUD-VASH page. We've got some basic information for you there.

Meghan Deal, National Director of the HUD-VASH Program, thank you so much for joining us.

Meghan Deal: Thanks, Shawn.

Shawn Liu: Next up to help us learn more about legal services and why providing legal services are so important to Veterans experiencing homelessness and housing instability, we're joined by Ms. Madolyn Gingell. She is the National Coordinator for the Legal Services for Veterans Program here in the Homeless Programs Office.

Madolyn thanks so much for being here with us today.

Madolyn Gingell: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

Shawn Liu: What are some of the legal issues that can impact Veteran homelessness and housing instability?

Madolyn Gingell: Honestly, it can vary. It could be as evident as landlord tenant [00:51:00] disputes, eviction notices, foreclosures or Veterans just not having access to support or proper mediation in simple housing issues that then escalate. We also see situations such as like unresolved child support or custody issues, or divorce. Those can certainly cause financial strain. And of course Veterans experiencing credit issues sent to debt collectors, tax issues, outstanding warrants and fines, these all present barriers to Veterans having the financial capability to really secure stable housing. And then lastly, what we see, unfortunately, are other Veterans that are experiencing intimate partner violence or domestic violence and simply do not have a safe place to call home.

Shawn Liu: Yeah really insightful stuff. And so what I heard from there that legal issues can really impact Veterans both with their housing stability. So they have a place right now, but the legal issues can put that place that they're living at, at jeopardy and put them at risk of homelessness.

But I also heard a little bit that it can actually make the housing process [00:52:00] harder for folks who are currently homeless, but are trying to exit homelessness and move into permanent housing, that those legal issues, if they're still outstanding, can make it harder for them to finally move back into their own units.

Madolyn Gingell: Correct. Correct. Yes.

Shawn Liu: How does VA actually help Veterans address their legal issues, both to keep them from becoming homeless or to make it easier for them to get housed if they are?

Madolyn Gingell: Well currently, within our Homeless Programs Office, we have kind of two different established avenues for that. First, we oversee the pro bono legal clinics that are occurring on VA property. And these are situations where attorneys come to the VA, provide specific types of civil legal services free of charge to Veterans. We currently have approximately 50 established medical legal partnerships and over 100 less formal VA affiliated legal clinics across the VHA. The second avenue, the second opportunity, is that VA has grant funding.

So, specifically for the provision of legal services. In [00:53:00] fact, August 1st of 2023 began the first ever Legal Services for Homeless Veterans and Veterans at Risk for Homelessness grant program. As we refer to LSV-H grant program.

So just to kind of give you and the listeners an idea the types of legal services provided through the grant program are housing law or family law, assistance with income support, and that could be through public benefits or federal benefits, requests to upgrade a military discharge, legal assistance with protective orders or other matters related to domestic violence, legal assistance with access to health care, consumer law matters, and that's your debt collection, fraud, financial exploitation employment matters, and limited criminal defense, like such as a request to expunge, or seal a criminal record.

Shawn Liu: Awesome. Outstanding stuff. Madolyn, thanks so much. Before we let you go, how can folks learn more if they want to know more?

Madolyn Gingell: We have a website, the VA Legal Services for Veterans website, which is where we [00:54:00] list our current grantees, how you can contact them, the areas that they serve. We also have a listing of our pro bono legal services across the VHA and some non VA legal services that may be available to Veterans.

Shawn Liu: Madolyn Gingell is the National Coordinator for the Legal Services for Veterans Program here in the Homeless Programs Office.

Madolyn, thank you so much for your insights.

Madolyn Gingell: Thank you. It's a pleasure being here.

Shawn Liu: All right, joining us. Next is Dr. Carma Heitzmann, the National Director for Homeless Veteran Community Employment services here in the Homeless Programs Office.

Carma, thanks so much for being here with us today.

Dr. Carma Heitzmann: Shawn, thank you so much. It's a pleasure to be here.

Shawn Liu: So we actually had you on one of our very first episodes in our early season of Ending Veteran Homelessness to talk about employment. And this is the last of our series of the Intro to Homelessness. We've been talking so much about different areas of housing program models and interventions, but I want to shift gears.

We just heard from Madolyn Gingell about legal services. And so now I want to talk about employment services.

And you have been a magnificent advocate for the importance of employment as part of [00:55:00] Veterans' stability. But I want to get a little bit more details from you.

Why is, in the sea of all these different housing programs and services that VA and our community partners provide, why is employment important to all of that?

Dr. Carma Heitzmann: I am really glad you're asking that question because it is near and dear to my heart. There's the obvious reason. Employment provides an income which supports not only obtaining housing, but housing stability.

But beyond that, employment provides so many things that we sometimes take for granted. It provides a sense of purpose and connection to our communities. It improves quality of life. It decreases social isolation. It empowers Veterans by increasing their self confidence and their self sufficiency. And not only does employment decrease reliance on institutional care, it's also a protective factor against suicide, which is just a huge aspect of what employment provides.

I really like a quote from President Biden. I really take it to heart. He said, "A job is about a lot more than a paycheck. It's about your dignity, it's about respect, it's about [00:56:00] your place in the community." And this is something we want for all of the Veterans we serve who have experienced homelessness.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, that's a really great point. And I know that, especially for the staff who are working in permanent supportive housing programs or permanent housing programs, whether it be programs like HUD-VASH or Supportive Services for Veteran Families, that getting Veterans housed is just the first step. Getting Veterans access to social services is the next step.

But then there's this concept of community integration, feeling a part of their neighborhoods, feeling that they have a role in society. That's really, really important.

And for those Veterans who need to find those roles, once again, in many instances, their past military service provided that role. But now that they've rejoined us as civilians, some of that role identity, like where do I fit in this world gets lost. And a lot of times employment can be that solution.

And another thing that I think of just as an aside, whenever you and I have hung out and we've talked about employment, we usually talk about employable

Veterans. But employment can be something that's right for Veterans even with disabling conditions as well. Veterans who are on disability, whether it be VA [00:57:00] disability benefits, Social Security disability benefits.

I know we've touched on and we probably don't have a lot of time to talk about this today, but can you share a little bit about the concept of income maximization, which is just this interesting strategy for folks who are receiving disability benefits, but who want to be able to increase their income just a little bit more.

Dr. Carma Heitzmann: Absolutely. We take an approach that any Veteran who is interested in employment deserves the opportunity to try that out. So it doesn't matter if he or she has a disability. It doesn't matter if they have other kinds of income coming in. It doesn't matter how old they are. Our staff are expected to offer employment services and opportunities to any Veteran that has any interest in going back to work.

And a lot times benefits by themselves, they help. They may provide certain income, but it doesn't do enough. It often doesn't provide enough for people to live, especially in very high cost of living areas. It doesn't really provide them a way to thrive when they're housed within their communities.

So [00:58:00] combining any benefits they may be entitled to with even part time work, not only helps them increase their income or maximize their income, but then the employment piece adds those other things that we've just talked about: being a part of their community and feeling that they are back in the driver's seat again in terms of their life and their goals.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, fantastic stuff. Let's talk about now, how VA helps Veterans get connected to meaningful employment.

You are the National Director of Homeless Veterans Community Employment Services. And I admittedly just found myself stumbling over the words a little bit, because one of the things that if I remember correctly about HVCES is that it's not a program. It's not technically a program office. It's not its own thing. But instead if I remember correctly, it's a series of services that are delivered in the context of all of the other programs that we just talked about today.

So can you share a little bit about how HVCES helps Veterans get connected to employment.

Dr. Carma Heitzmann: Sure. And you explained it perfectly. So our employment staff are embedded in the larger homeless program teams at medical centers. Veterans don't need to [00:59:00] apply to a separate program to get help finding a job. Our staff are part of the homeless team. They are part of the team that is helping that Veteran obtain housing.

So they're right there in the room helping decide what they can offer, what may be available in the community for those Veterans. So employment assistance is really one of the wraparound services available on the path to permanent housing.

And our model embraces both providing services directly to homeless Veterans, so that one-to-one employment assistance that seems to be the thing that we all think about, such as job leads, interview skills, resume writing. But our staff, even more importantly, serve as a bridge to employment opportunities and resources in the community that VA may not be able to provide, because VA can't provide every single thing that may be helpful to a given Veteran in getting them back into the workforce. And we know that there's a wealth of employment related resources available through both other VA programs outside of the homeless program, and also through our federal partners such as Department of Labor, local community [01:00:00] providers, and we really try to harness those resources and bring them back for the Veterans we're serving.

And, we also understand that every homeless Veteran's journey to employment is different. Veterans have varied work experiences. They have different challenges to reentering the workforce, and they have different preferences. And our staff take an individualized approach to each Veteran's job search to increase the likelihood of their success.

Shawn Liu: Excellent, excellent. Carma, before we let you go. Where can folks learn more? If they're curious about how to get connected to the different medical centers, employment specialists or an adjust learn more about what HVCES does?

Dr. Carma Heitzmann: So, It's really easy. If you can go to the website, www.va.gov/homeless, and if you scroll down to Community Employment Services, we actually have a list of all of our Community Employment Coordinators by State so that you can actually contact them directly if you have a job opportunity you'd like to offer or you want more information. And we also on the website have wonderful success [01:01:00] stories and a little bit more background information and it's all in one place and really easy to navigate.

Shawn Liu: Fantastic. We're going to put links to all of that in the description. so you can check them out.

Dr. Carma Heitzmann is the National Director for the Homeless Veteran Community Employment Services here in the Homeless Programs, Office.

Carma, thanks so much for being here with us. today.

Dr. Carma Heitzmann: Thank you so much, Shawn. Appreciate it.

Shawn Liu: Joining us once again, to talk about how we deliver medical care to homeless Veterans is Dr. Jillian Weber, the National Program Manager for Homeless Patient Line Care Teams here in the Homeless Programs Office.

Jillian, welcome back.

Dr. Jillian Weber: Thank you for having me!

Shawn Liu: Yeah. So we had you on the second episode of this Introduction to Veteran Homelessness series, to learn more about the different health care conditions that Veterans experiencing homelessness and housing instability may face. So this is going to be like part two of you coming on.

We've already talked so much on this episode about the different housing interventions from emergency shelter, to transitional housing, to permanent housing. And other services like outreach, to legal, to employment, and all that stuff. And with all of [01:02:00] the different programs, it's easy to forget sometimes that we, uh, you and I, and everybody who was on today's episode, we're with the Veterans Health Administration. So we do healthcare, right?

And when there's such a focus on housing and all of those other services, we sometimes forget about good old fashioned medical care that many of our Veterans need for a variety of reasons, including the fact that, you know, our Veterans, many of them have been homeless for a long time. And they might have for lack of a better term, deferred maintenance to their bodies and their health that can finally be addressed through medical care and other services now that the Veterans are getting stably housed.

So Jillian, even though like, it goes without saying, could you share with us, why is it important for us to connect Veterans who are homeless and experiencing housing, instability to medical care?

Dr. Jillian Weber: Yeah, Shawn, it's really important to ensure those individuals experiencing homelessness have access to medical care, mental health services, and of course, social services.

The HPACT team is a multidisciplinary, population tailored approach. It's a model [01:03:00] of care that really focuses on the Veterans themselves and understanding their experiences of homelessness. The model really looks at the unique needs and distinct challenges these Veterans face when not only accessing healthcare services, but that long term engagement.

The way this is accomplished is to really look at the barriers that Veterans face. In terms of access, that's one key piece. We know that's a significant barrier. And that looks differently in different locations as well.

The model itself allows for walk in clinic. That's a key component of the HPACT model. What this means is a Veteran can walk in off the street and have access to their healthcare team. They can have access to medications, they can get a health screening, maybe a vaccination if that's needed.

There's also the provision in this model of care of what we call wraparound, one stop shop services. What that means is these services are co located in one location. So a Veteran doesn't have to travel to a different location, a different building, and then explain their situation and [01:04:00] themselves to multiple individuals. Because that is challenging, it's exhausting, and really this helps navigating the healthcare system and it takes away some of those challenges.

What that means is there's mental health services, homeless program services, and then primary care. It's all co located and integrated together to provide the best case scenario and the best possible services to Veterans experiencing homelessness.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, outstanding stuff. And one of the things that I've always loved about HPACT is that it's a very concrete way in which we as the system change ourselves to be more responsive and to reduce the barriers for a specific subpopulation, in this case, homeless Veterans, rather than making them, the Veterans, contort themselves to work for us as a system. This is really important stuff.

Jillian, I appreciate having you on again today. Before we let you go. Where can folks learn more about HPACT?

Dr. Jillian Weber: Yeah, so we can provide the HPACT website, I can, I'm happy to share that link. And I also want to make everyone aware that [01:05:00] HPACT is also a platform for new initiatives and new programs because as you said, it's a model of care that really has adapted itself to provide the best service to Veterans experiencing homelessness.

It has changed, and actually, the model's fairly new, if you think. It has been around for a little over a decade, so it's still expanding. But one initiative that we've recently launched is utilizing mobile medical units to really expand and bring direct care and services to Veterans in the community setting.

Shawn Liu: Excellent. So we're going to put links to the HPACT website as well as a press release to the launch of our mobile medical units, which is really exciting. We're going to put links to all of those in the description so you can check it out.

Dr. Jillian Weber is the National Program Manager for Homeless Patient Aligned Care Teams here in the Homeless Programs Office.

Jillian, thanks so much for being here with us today.

Dr. Jillian Weber: Thank you.

Shawn Liu: Joining us to close us out and talk about community partnerships is Anthony Love, the Principal Advisor to the Executive Director for Intra and Inter Agency Collaboration and the Director of Community Engagement here in the Homeless Programs Office.

Anthony, thanks so much for being here [01:06:00] with us today.

Anthony Love: Thank you for having me! So glad to be here once again.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, we're at the home stretch of this podcast series, not just this episode, but the whole Intro to Homelessness series. So you're going to help us bring this to a close.

And yeah, you were actually on Ending veteran Homelessness a bit of a while ago to talk about unsheltered homelessness and racial equity. But we have you back to talk about your actual day job for inter and intra agency partnership and community engagement.

We just spent this entire episode learning about all the different programs and services that VA has for Veterans experiencing homelessness and housing instability. It's a massive alphabet soup of government jargon. And one of the things that's really important about your role, particularly here in the Homeless Programs Office, is that even with everything that we just talked about today, it's actually still not enough to end Veteran homelessness nationwide.

There are still gaps, despite everything we talked about. And bringing you on to close this out, I feel is really important because you have a lot of experience and insight into the concept of partnerships. The idea that we at VA can't do it alone. We need the help from [01:07:00] literally everybody else in the country.

And so Anthony, from a high level, what do partnerships look like in the context of our work to end Veteran homelessness?

Anthony Love: Oh that's a good question. I think that you just nailed it on the head in terms of making sure that we have those partnerships because even with everything we have we can't do it alone. But what partnerships look like, it is a bringing together or collaboration if you will between VA and a non VA partner. Some people say public private partnerships, but it's not always a quote unquote private entity.

People may be amazed to understand that a partnership could be with another federal agency or with a state entity or a local government entity or with a private sector company or so forth.

The idea is to have these partnerships to bridge gaps that could prevent the Veteran from fully exiting homelessness or being able to exit homelessness and be able to sustain that housing that they have newly moved into.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, that makes sense. Anthony, why partnerships though? Like, how come we don't have enough resources and funding to [01:08:00] cover everything? And what are some specific gaps that partnerships fill?

Anthony Love: The reason for partnerships is because we just can't. Some things we can't do because statutorily, as a federal agency, there are some things that we're just not legally able to do. For example, we can't buy furniture for a Veteran who has newly moved into an apartment. And I would think most people would agree that furnishings and essentials are necessary to make that housing feel like a home.

Also, too, there are things to help to facilitate the Veteran moving into the home, like deposits and so forth. And although we have a program that helps with that, it does not cover every single community in the United States. There are areas where that doesn't exist. And therefore, we would have those partnerships because those Veterans also deserve to be able to have that resource to move in.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, those are really great points.

I want to adjust like home in a little bit before we start wrapping up both our time with you and this episode in this series.

The main thing that you brought up, this idea of lacking statutory authority. A civics lesson [01:09:00] for the way the federal government works. Federal agencies, especially those in the executive branch, we can only do stuff that Congress gives us the authority to do. Like if you ever heard somebody flippantly say, "On what authority can you do dah dah dah dah dah?" That's, that's what we mean.

There are a lot of things out there that are great ideas. But if we don't have the statutory, the legal, the legislative authority to do a thing, we can't actually do it.

And, also just as an aside, you actually want it to be this way. This is... you actually like as citizens for it to be this way. Like to be clear, you don't want me or Anthony just going rogue, doing whatever that we want. I know you and I, Anthony, we're good people. We've both got good hearts, so to speak, we got good ideas. But again, to be clear, the taxpayers don't want us just riffing and doing our own thing. They want us to be, like, constrained by what your legislature, or your representatives said that we can do.

And that's a big reason, as you just mentioned, why partnerships are so [01:10:00] critical. Because there are still so many other great ideas that we just can't do yet because Congress didn't give us the permission to do it.

Anthony Love: No we can't, I think you hit upon a great point. I don't think if the citizenry just really thought about it, would you want one entity doing everything?

Because if you're doing everything, then you're probably not doing nothing well. And the idea that VA sticks to the things that they do well, the clinical support, the healthcare, the services and so forth. They do that very well. One thing that we probably wouldn't do well is to build housing.

That's just not in our ballywick. And there are excellent groups out there that do these jobs extremely well. So it makes sense to partner with them so that they can do what's best. VA can do what's best and it works out best for the Veteran.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, you definitely don't want me with a table saw or a nail gun. I just. The injuries will be plentiful.

Anthony, this has been fantastic. Before we let you go. Before we round out today's episode, where can folks learn more about partnerships, especially if they want to partner with the VA?

Anthony Love: You can go to our website [01:11:00] www.va.gov/homeless. You can find about how to partner with VA on that website and who to contact. Or, you can shoot me an email at anthony.love@va.gov.

Shawn Liu: Anthony Love is the Principal Advisor to the Executive Director for Intra and Inter Agency Collaboration and the Director of Community Engagement here in the Homeless Programs Office.

Anthony, thanks so much for being here with us today.

Anthony Love: Thanks for having me.

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.

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, 7 days a week. That number again is 877-424-3838.

If you're enjoying the show, leave us a review on Apple Podcasts. It would really help us out.

That's all for now. We hope that you found this time to be [01:12:00] 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. [01:13:00]