

NEWS UPDATE - VA's 2023 Homelessness Goals

Jill Albanese: [00:00:00] Yes, we can do this. It is ambitious, but we have to do it. It's the right thing to do. And we have fantastic folks working at VA out in the field who are just relentless and are helping the most vulnerable Veterans and are very good at their jobs. And I have no doubt that we can do this again. Welcome to Ending Veteran Homelessness, your firsthand look into our nation's efforts to ensure that every Veteran has a safe and stable place to call home. From the Department of Veterans Affairs, Homeless Programs Office, I'm your host, Shawn Liu.

Shawn Liu: If you're a Veteran who's homeless or at risk of homelessness, reach out. Call the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 877-424-3838. Trained counselors are standing by to help 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That number again is 877-424-3838.[00:01:00]

Hey everybody. Shawn here got another news update for you today.

Earlier today, VA announced our 2023 homelessness goals. So, to figure out what they are and what that means for Veterans experiencing homelessness and housing instability, we brought her back. You know her, Jill Albanese, Senior Advisor and Director of Clinical Operations here in the Homeless Programs Office.

Let's just jump on in. Jill, welcome to the show.

Jill Albanese: Hey, Shawn, thanks for having me back!

Shawn Liu: Yeah, we just keep having you back. I mean, like, listen, you're fantastic. So, every opportunity to have you on the show is great.

Okay. New homelessness goals announced earlier today. But before we get into that, let's just kind of level set with everybody.

Not even two months ago we had you on to announce the results of last year's goal. Tell us a little bit about what that goal was and how we did.

Jill Albanese: Last year, calendar year 2022, [00:02:00] VA set a goal to permanently house 38,000 Veterans. And, I'm really happy to say that we

actually exceeded that goal. So we housed 40,401 Veterans. It was a lot of work and the field just did an amazing job.

So, yes, we're very excited that we have new goals again this year.

Shawn Liu: We have new goals again. And honestly, we kind of saw this coming, right? You and I have been talking about it for a wee bit. The dedicated staff in the field, the social workers, and the nurses, and the peer support specialists, especially as we were announcing the results, they're like, "Okay, well what's next? What, what are we headed at?"

Earlier today they were announced. We have our new goals. What is in store? What is VA going to be delivering for Veterans experiencing homelessness and housing instability in 2023?

Jill Albanese: Yeah, and you're right Shawn. Nobody was surprised or nobody should be surprised that we set new goals again for this calendar year.

So here's what we're going to do this year. We are going to house 38,000 more [00:03:00] Veterans this calendar year. I will note that the number of Veterans experiencing homeless has been going down in the past couple of years. So we think keeping that goal the same is still a very ambitious goal.

Shawn Liu: I can already hear you like, like getting ahead of the, "Why isn't the number you're, how going higher Jill. Like why are you keeping it the same?"

Jill Albanese: Yes.

Shawn Liu: That makes a lot of sense though, that we are seeing reductions. And so keeping steady and sustainable probably makes a ton of sense, right?

Jill Albanese: Yes, yes. We believe it's a great goal.

The other thing that we're gonna do, and one of the other reasons why we are keeping it the same, is that we are going to focus on a couple of other key areas.

So in addition to housing 38,000 more Veterans, we are going to focus on engaging with our unsheltered Veterans. We recognize that folks who are experiencing unsheltered homelessness, folks who are living in their cars, living in encampments, even just living on the streets or in abandoned buildings, places not meant for human habitation, those folks are extremely vulnerable. We really [00:04:00] wanna make sure that we are doing everything that we can

to get those folks engaged with programs, to get them into housing as quickly as possible. So that's another key area that we're gonna focus on.

We also want to focus on making sure that our Veterans who are placed in permanent housing don't return to homelessness. So, we have set a pretty ambitious target that we want at least 95% of the Veterans that we house to stay housed.

There are always gonna be folks who fall out of housing. We sometimes say that permanent housing is a journey and that folks will, for a variety of reasons, lose their housing at some point in time. But we wanna make sure that the majority of folks do keep their housing.

In addition to setting that very ambitious target for keeping folks permanently housed, we also want to ensure that the folks who do fall out of housing are reengaged with. That we don't give up on those folks. We wanna rehouse them as quickly as possible or get them on a path to housing as quickly as possible.

So that's [00:05:00] another area that we're gonna look at, just really focusing on keeping those folks housed. And if folks do fall out of homelessness, get them back into housing as quickly as.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, that makes a ton of sense.

You used a term here that I'm sure we're gonna be socializing a lot and doing a lot of training on, which is the concept of "permanent housing." I'm, you you can't see me cuz it's radio, but I'm doing scare quotes, right? "Permanent housing."

And we've already gotten questions about this like, "Hold on, Shawn, Jill. What do you mean? If, if they're permanently housed, how are they returning to homelessness? Like, that doesn't make any sense with that word. That's not how words work, Shawn and Jill." But what we're largely talking about is the difference between say, an emergency shelter, which is temporary, a transitional housing program, which is also temporary.

So, permanent housing is in contrast to those two, right?

Jill Albanese: Yes, that's correct. So when we talk about permanent housing, we are talking, about a Veteran who has an apartment, has signed a lease, they're renting a place, a permanent place just like you and I would say, [00:06:00] "We've got an apartment that's our permanent housing place."

Same thing for a Veteran. And that's what we have always defined permanent housing as. We do not consider transitional housing where you can only stay for a limited number of days or months, we don't consider that permanent housing. To us, permanent housing, again, a place where a Veteran can stay as long as they want to, they've signed a lease, they've got an agreement that they can stay there. So that's our definition of permanent housing.

Shawn Liu: And it's also my understanding, it's not their forever home either. Like you're permanently housed right now. Acknowledging that the concept of permanent housing, again, you can't see it, but I'm doing scare quotes, "permanent housing," it's jargon. it's homeless service provider jargon, right?

But it's also not our forever home. Like you're permanently housed. I'm permanently housed. But I will not be here for the rest of my life. There's a good chance, you know, I, I bought this place. I might sell it one day. I might move somewhere. Similarly, Veterans who get permanently housed, even if they don't fall back into homelessness again, they may move, they may leave, they may go across the country, they may [00:07:00] find something nicer, especially if they get more money. So we're not saying that this is the one spot that Veterans are gonna stay for the rest of their lives. We are saying that we're housing them in a setting that's different from a temporary setting, like emergency shelter or transitional housing.

Jill Albanese: Exactly. And to your point, Shawn, I consider this my permanent home, but I may wanna move someday to another state.

Shawn Liu: May wanna move someday!

Jill Albanese: Or another neighborhood. So absolutely, absolutely. Same thing.

Shawn Liu: So just to kind of summarize, all right, so three main goals, maybe like four depending on how you count it.

Permanently housing another 38,000 Veterans. Engaging unsheltered Veterans. Making sure that our staff are going out and bringing unsheltered Veterans, so people out in the woods, people out in tents, or in encampments or under bridges, bringing them into our system, getting them either temporary housing or ideally permanent housing. And then trying to keep the number of Veterans who fall back into homelessness low. And then just staying relentless and going back and not leaving anybody behind and getting them either rehoused or [00:08:00] on a path to rehousing. Yeah, pretty ambitious.

Like, like I, I know last year, um, you know, I kind of put you on the spot and I said, "Jill, can we do this?" And, uh, tho those sound kind of ambitious. So I'm gonna ask you again, Jill, can we do this?

Jill Albanese: Yes we can. Yes, we can do this. It is ambitious, but we have to do it. It's the right thing to do. And we have fantastic folks working at VA out in the field who are just relentless and are helping the most vulnerable Veterans and are very good at their jobs. And I have no doubt that we can do this again.

Shawn Liu: Excellent, because I'm getting a little anxious.

Before we let you go, Jill just wanted to get a sense, especially for those, who might be curious about the how.

How are we gonna do this? Obviously you and I will not be specifically like doing outreach and physically moving Veterans in. We are largely supporting the staff all across the country that are doing this. So before we let you go, what are some of the ways in which we plan to support those staff as they do the work to house [00:09:00] Veterans, keep them housed, and bring unsheltered Veterans into our care?

Jill Albanese: We are going to do some of the same things that we did last year because it worked. We intend to provide very targeted technical assistance, meaning that we're going to provide expert advice, gonna have folks who have had expertise in doing this work before go onsite to various medical centers and talk with them about improving their system.

In addition, we'll provide broad technical assistance to all of the VA medical centers through monthly office hours calls. We will talk through promising practices on those calls. We will talk about challenges. And we will offer policies and guidance, toolkits. We're just going to provide as much support as we possibly can. The other thing that is important to note is that we learned a lot last year. We have a lot of promising practices to share and we'll offer a lot of opportunities for peer learning and talk through what did we learn, what were the challenges that we overcame last year. And so we think that this is going to be a great [00:10:00] opportunity for peers to share all of the really good work that they've done.

Shawn Liu: Yeah. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. I'm really excited and folks really respond so well. They love hearing solutions that St. Cloud, Minnesota figure out, and that might be applicable in Burlington, Vermont, right?

Jill Albanese: Yeah.

Shawn Liu: Sharing all of those practices is important, is critical.

Jill Albanese: Absolutely.

Shawn Liu: So great to have you on again. It's always a pleasure. I feel hopeful already. I was getting a little bit anxious, but I could feel hopeful from your confidence.

Jill Albanese: We're gonna do it again.

Shawn Liu: We're gonna do it again. Jill Albanese is the Senior Advisor to the Executive Director and Director of Clinical Operations here in the Homeless Programs Office.

Jill, my dear friend and colleague. Thank you so much for the gift of your time.

Jill Albanese: Thank you so much again, Shawn.

Shawn Liu: If you're a Veteran who is 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 [00:11:00] 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.