

GRAND RAPIDS AREA COALITION TO END HOMELESSNESS MAINTAINING USICH FEDERAL CRITERIA AND BENCHMARKS TO ENDING VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM RESPONSE

Introduction and Background

In 2010, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) introduced the first comprehensive federal strategy to prevent and end homelessness. This plan, called Opening Doors, outlined a number of goals related to ending homelessness in the U.S. – the first of these committed to ending Veteran homelessness by 2016.

In 2015, the USICH, along with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), adopted a vision of what it means to end homelessness and shared specific criteria and benchmarks for ending Veteran homelessness in order to help guide communities as they take action to achieve the goal, with a focus on long-term, lasting solutions.

In line with the federal goals outlined in Opening Doors, the Grand Rapids Area Coalition to End Homelessness has committed to a goal of effectively ending Veteran homelessness in the CoC by 2017. To that end, the Grand Rapids Area Coalition has focused recent efforts on a housing first approach to ensuring all Veterans have access to safe and affordable housing.

The Grand Rapids Area Coalition has determined that ending Veteran homelessness in our CoC means the following:

Where Veteran homelessness does occur, it is rare, brief, and non-recurring. More specifically, every identified homeless Veteran who is unsheltered is immediately offered access to low-barrier shelter, and every Veteran who is unsheltered or in emergency shelter or Transitional Housing in Kent County is immediately offered access to low-barrier permanent housing placement and stabilization assistance. Veterans who accept assistance will be re-housed within an average of 90 days. To achieve this, the CoC is committed to the principles of Housing First, which means our system is primarily focused on quick placement into permanent housing, respecting Veteran choice, and targeting our resources to those with greatest needs.

Using the federal criteria and benchmarks as our guide, this document includes policies and procedures for a coordinated and standardized response to Veteran homelessness across our entire community.

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Responsibility for Oversight

In July of 2016, The Grand Rapids Area Coalition Steering Committee voted and approved, Community Rebuilders a Supportive Services for Veteran Families funded organization as the lead grantee/organization charged with managing the Ending Veteran Homelessness Community Planning and Coordination. This includes managing and maintaining the community's By Name List (described below). In addition Community Rebuilders, in partnership with the Grand Rapids Area Coalition, is to ensure that the policies and procedures outlined in this document are implemented appropriately at the system, provider, and client level, and regularly monitoring progress towards ending Veteran Homelessness goal and continued maintenance of the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness designation.

Common Terms

Veteran

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

*It does not require that the National Guard be active duty under Title 10 for BNL additions (though the Veteran would have to have Title 10 service in order to be eligible for any VA housing resources). There are other, limited instances when National Guard may be added to the BNL without Title 10. This includes being called up to active duty but never actually deployed, serving Title 32 service under the state Governor orders, State Active Duty (SAD), or serving as an active guard reserve member. Regular National Guard service and training does not qualify for the BNL.

Permanent Housing Assistance (i.e., “permanent housing intervention”)

A subsidy or other form of rental assistance, with appropriate services and supports. Interventions can include SSVF, HUD-VASH, and CoC Program-funded rapid re-housing (where rental assistance is included), CoC Program-funded permanent supportive housing, Housing Choice voucher (HCV), or other form of permanent housing subsidy or rental assistance.

By Name List

The By Name List is the primary means used to identify and track all currently homeless Veterans (unsheltered, in emergency shelter or transitional housing) in

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Kent County and to report on current housing plans and movement towards permanent housing. HMIS is the primary data source for the by name list and includes multiple data fields necessary to identify and track assistance and outcomes for individual Veterans.

Homeless

Individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning:

1. Has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not meant for human habitation; or
2. Is living in a publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state and local government programs); or
3. Is exiting an institution where (s)he has resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution.

Identifying Homeless Veterans

1. **Policy** – All literally homeless Veterans in Kent County geographic area are immediately identified.

Procedure – Supportive Services for Veteran Families Outreach Teams engage in street outreach on a weekly basis, as appropriate, for purposes of identifying all unsheltered homeless Veterans.

- CR SSVF staff coordinate with the CoC, Housing Assessment Program, VA outreach, MTM, and VOA SSVF outreach to ensure comprehensive coverage and efficient provision of services.
- Adding Veterans to the by name list (see EVH process below).

Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness Process

Enhancing the current process by allowing the community to refer homeless Veterans for services through an improved coordinated outreach and engagement process to ensure all Veterans who are experiencing literal homelessness in the community are entered onto the Veteran By- Name List

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This workflow is not intended to replace a referral to coordinated entry and should not be used as an alternative to referring a Veteran to The Salvation Army's Housing Assessment Program (HAP).

Phase 1:

1. If a homeless Veterans enters any HMIS participating provider the provider will complete an immediate HMIS referral service transaction to the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness provider page. If the Veteran is not connected to a housing resource please add a need with a note indicating outreach instructions. A signed ROI must accompany the referral in the file attachments as an upload.
 - a. *Ex. Homeless Veteran enters an emergency shelter project, the data entry staff will do an HMIS referral service transaction to the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness provider page.*
2. If a Veteran calls HAP for an assessment or completes the CHC assessment online but doesn't have their DD214 available, HAP will refer the Veteran to the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness page via HMIS referral service transaction
3. If a Veteran is referred to HAP via the VA and is accompanied with their DD214, HAP will add the Veteran to the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness by-name-list through an entry-exit utilizing the HAP Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness Workflow
4. If a Veteran completes the CHC assessment and meets with a member of the Veteran outreach team, staff will notify the Director of Program Evaluation and Quality Assurance at Community Rebuilders.
5. Community Rebuilders will be alerted to all incoming referrals to the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness page and produce an Outreach list
6. The Outreach team will go out weekly or more frequently as needed to engage and confirm Veteran status

Phase 2:

1. Literally homeless Veterans (*see definitions below*) are added to the by-name list through a basic program entry onto a Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness provider page.
2. Veterans are then referred to the lead agency, Community Rebuilders, for further assessment.
3. Community Rebuilders SSVF program will confirm Homeless status and acquire proof of veteran status.

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4. Clients whom do not meet the definition of literally homeless and/or U.S. Military veteran will be referred outward for assistance, where possible, and exited from the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness entry appropriately.
5. Clients whom meet all program requirements for assistance and completed a housing plan, will be given a service transaction (left without an end date) within the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness entry to denote they are active and connected clients.
6. Once a veteran has a program outcome (Housing, inactive for 90 days, 3 consecutive failed contacts, deceased, moved out of state, ultimately not a veteran), the service transaction is end dated and they are exited from the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness entry.
7. Once Veteran status has been confirmed CR staff will add the Veteran to the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness by-name-list
8. The current workflow for managing the Veteran by-name-list is based on the benchmarks and standards set by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH).

Exit Destination

Data Not Collected = Inactive Client

No Exit Interview Completed = Not a Veteran

Deceased = Deceased

Other = Moved out of State/County

Rental by Client with no ongoing subsidy = Permanent Housing was obtained/maintained

Visibility and Management

All HMIS participating agencies and non HMIS participating agencies can participate in Phase 1

Community Rebuilders will manage Phase 2

CoC System Administrator will have visibility of the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness By-Name List

The Salvation Army HAP will have visibility of the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness By-Name List

All HMIS participating agencies will be responsible for updating Community Rebuilders when a Veteran has moved into housing

BNL Reporting

1. **Policy** – All literally homeless Veterans identified in Kent County are tracked on

Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness Committee 2016, 2018, 2021, 2023

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the EVH By Name List.

Procedure – The CoC HMIS System Administrator, Coordinated Entry staff and Community Rebuilders (SSVF lead agency) all have access to maintain and populate the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness by name list and reporting capabilities.

- Community Rebuilders pulls the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness BNL report utilizing data from HMIS, on a bi-weekly basis, updating the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness data and the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmark to Ending Veteran Homelessness data dashboard accordingly.
 - The report includes data on all literally homeless Veterans in the CoC
 - HMIS serves as the primary data source for the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness report.
 - The Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks To Ending Veteran Homelessness BNL report is used to manage Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks To Ending Veteran Homelessness

Procedure – Grand Rapids Area Coalition HMIS Providers working with homeless Veterans are responsible for adding Veterans served in HMIS by the corresponding project serving the Veteran.

The Veteran's Administration (a non HMIS provider) is responsible for faxing Veteran referrals to the Housing Assessment Program

The Veteran's Administration is responsible for communicating all HUD-VASH voucher recipient entry's and exits to Community Rebuilders, in order to update the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks To Ending Veteran Homelessness BNL report adequately.

Providing Immediate Shelter to Unsheltered Homeless Veterans

- 2. Policy** – The Grand Rapids Area Continuum of Care is responsible for providing shelter immediately to any Veteran experiencing unsheltered homelessness who wants it.

Procedure – SSVF grantees and, where applicable, local dedicated street outreach teams assist in moving unsheltered homeless Veterans into local

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emergency shelters and transitional housing units.

- a. There is current program capacity through SSVF, VRS, and PDO programs to provide emergency shelter and or transitional housing to all unsheltered Veterans. In the case where shelter and transitional housing capacity are at full capacity, SSVF provider organizations may pay for a temporary stay in a local hotel/motel for the unsheltered homeless Veteran, where the Veteran is eligible and following SSVF requirements,
- b. If unsheltered Veterans decline an emergency shelter offer because of excessive barriers to entry (i.e., barriers that do not comply with the Grand Rapids Area Coalition Homeless Program Standards), SSVF or other program staff working with the Veteran will contact CoC staff to report the issue and CoC and SSVF/other staff will advocate on behalf of the unsheltered homeless Veteran
 - o If the issues with local shelter barriers to entry cannot be immediately resolved, SSVF grantees may pay for a temporary stay in a local hotel/motel for the unsheltered homeless Veteran, where the Veteran is eligible and following SSVF requirements

- 3. Policy** – SSVF, VRS, and GPD homeless services providers assisting unsheltered homeless Veterans will document offers of shelter

Procedure – SSVF, VRS, and GPD providers and local dedicated street outreach teams or other providers assisting unsheltered homeless Veterans, document the offers of shelter they make to Veterans

- a. Documentation is made on the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks To Ending Veteran Homelessness BNL and includes identifying the date of the shelter offer, whether the Veteran accepted or declined, and reasons for a decline

Housing Focused System and Providers

- 4. Policy** – The Grand Rapids Area Coalition is committed to immediately providing permanent housing (PH) to all homeless Veterans who desire it, regardless of perceived needs or issues

Procedure – SSVF, GPD, and VRS providers will contact homeless Veterans within 3 business days for program intake.

Referral to SSVF does not necessarily mean that a Veteran will be assisted with

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SSVF resources. SSVF grantees must determine if the Veteran is eligible and if the Veteran desires to accept an offer of assistance.

- SSVF providers will only decline to provide RRH assistance to homeless Veterans if they are not eligible per SSVF program requirements or if the Veterans decline SSVF-RRH assistance
 - For Veterans who may require additional support than what RRH can provide the Coordinated Entry staff will match the Veteran to the most appropriate resource, following CoC Coordinated Entry policies and procedures.
 - SSVF program funding may be used as bridge housing in the interim until a connection to PSH is made.

Active List Meetings: will be the responsibility of the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to End Veteran Homelessness workgroup. USICH states that communities must have an active list (aka by name list) that identifies all homeless Veterans, including those who are in unsheltered as well as sheltered locations. Kent County must demonstrate the list is updated at least monthly. The list may include data sources such as HOMES and HMIS.

There are four building blocks to a By-Name list: 1. Targeted Outreach 2. Standardized Assessment tool 3. Release of Information (ROI) and 4. Data Platform (measuring success will help to evaluate the process and empower timely adjustments to be made).

Purpose: to sustain a well-coordinated and efficient community system that ensures homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring and no Veteran is forced to live on the street.

All providers will continue to utilize the Kent County Coordinated Entry program (The Housing Assessment Program for all referrals).

The By Name list will continue to be maintained by Coordinated Entry (The Salvation Army) and the Lead Agency (Community Rebuilders) to ensure all Veterans are located and linked to the appropriate service.

HMIS, Coordinated Entry and the VA's HOMES data system are the data tools used to reach and end to Veteran homelessness and will be maintained. The VA and/or CR will continue to verify Veteran Status.

Active List meetings are held monthly and will achieve the following objectives:

- Ensuring the by name list remains comprehensive, meaning it captures all Veterans experiencing homelessness in the community (specifically, the

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entire geographic area overseen by the Continuum of Care), including all unsheltered Veterans and those in all emergency shelter (including Health Care for Homeless Veterans contract beds, and transitional housing (including Grant and Per Diem (GPD) beds).

- Confirm the list includes Veterans who are and are not eligible for VA services.
- Verify the list is dynamic and updated frequently, preferably daily or weekly, and at least monthly. The list is never “complete”.
- Check the list includes basic elements needed to track shelter, housing, and assistance offered to and being used by Veterans, as well as when Veterans exit homelessness and are no longer known to be literally homeless.
- Assess Veterans who re-enter the system are tracked and monitored to support thoughtful decisions about how to best assist each Veteran household in achieving permanent housing as quickly as possible
- Discuss Veterans “in crisis” who have been identified by partner agency or in the community but has not been connected to a resource or entered on the by name list.
- Discuss Veterans on the BNL who are in crisis, Veterans who have returned to homelessness in the past year, Veterans active on the BNL for ≥ 91 days with no housing move in.
- Ensure the list is used as a prioritization tool by Coordinated Entry
- Make community data available through dashboards that include the number of Veterans entering the system, exits, exit destination, and average time from identification to permanent housing placement.
- Complete On-going assessment of systemic bottlenecks and barriers in the homeless system
- Inform process improvement and reduce inefficiencies
- Coordinate with the Veteran Action Board committee to ensure Veterans with lived experience influence system change

Active List Meetings will exclude:

- General consumer updates
- Using meeting time to update the by name list
- Matching Veterans to housing (this should be done in real time through HAP and electronically through HMIS)

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Respecting Consumer Privacy & Confidentiality:

In order for an agency representative to access or review the active list of veterans on the By Name List they must be part of the Michigan Statewide Homeless Management Information System (MSHMIS) release of information sharing agreement. Those who desire to participate in the Maintaining Functional Work Group are not required to be part of this sharing agreement and may have access to By Name List data and outcomes, but are unable to participate in the Active List Meeting.

The only client specific information that may be discussed during this meeting is personal identifying information and current living situation. No health related or consumer protected information will be discussed, transmitted, received, stored, or otherwise dealt with and all meeting participants are fully bound by state and federal regulations governing confidentiality

Monitoring System and Provider Capacity to End Veteran Homelessness

- 5. Policy** – The CoC, Housing Assessment Program and Community Rebuilders through the Veteran Resource Chart monitor provider and system capacity to ensure the CoC maintains resources to move homeless Veterans into PH quickly

Procedure – SSVF, GPD, and VRS providers maintain program openings via the HAP resource chart on a regular basis.

- 6. Policy** – The Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmark to Ending Veteran Homelessness committee monitors progress on the federal benchmarks for Maintaining Veteran homelessness to ensure the sustainability of the CoC's system response and identify any problems or issue areas

Procedure – On a monthly basis at minimum, Community Rebuilders staff will monitor and report on the following data:

- a. Federal Benchmarks (per the federal specifications)
 - i. Number of Actively Homeless Veterans (not having declined PH)
 - ii. Number of Chronically Homeless Veterans
 - iii. Average length of time to house Veterans
 - iv. Number of Veterans exiting to PH vs. number of Veterans entering homelessness
 - v. Number of Veterans entering TH (having declined PH offers) vs. number of Veterans entering homelessness
 - vi. Number of homeless Veterans entering our system (per month)
 - vii. Number of homeless Veterans exiting to PH (per month)

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- viii. Returns to homelessness across all project types
- ix. Number/rate of homeless Veterans served by non-VA funded programs
- x. Veterans in need to connect status

For Veterans in need to connect status System Case Conferencing will occur. Due to confidentiality procedures, only HMIS participating organizations and the Veterans Administration (who has signed a release of information) can participate in system case conferencing meetings.

System Case conferencing purpose:

System case conferencing is to ensure policy, processes and workflows are in place in order to ensure homelessness is rare, brief, and nonrecurring for Veterans (Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness status).

System case conferencing includes:

1. Increasing and building upon practices that house Veteran's faster (i.e. conducting housing focused outreach consistently).
2. Monitoring the by name list (BNL) and confirming regular updates and exits from homelessness are occurring.
3. Evaluating the availability of housing resources and any needs or gaps in service delivery.
4. Review of the equity dashboards.
5. Monitor and map system flow.
6. Review Veteran returns to homelessness- at least 95% of the Veterans housed in 2024 do not return to homelessness during the year. And of those who return to homelessness, ensure that at least 90% are rehoused or on a path to be rehoused by the end of 2024.
7. Review co-enrollment processes.
8. Review Veterans on the BNL in crisis/need to connect status (Participants in this discussion need to be on the QSOBAA or covered by VA routine use #30).

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The Veteran BNL provides real time data about Veterans experiencing homelessness in the community. System Case Conferencing meetings are used to ensure all providers understand and are utilizing the BNL and entering all data points. The Veteran BNL is maintained by The Grand Rapids Area Coalition to End Homelessness, and SSVF Lead Agency Community Rebuilders.

The BNL is utilized to ensure all Veterans are located and linked to the appropriate services.

Responsibility of the Maintaining USICH Federal Criteria and Benchmarks to Ending Veteran Homelessness Committee and Veteran Action Board ensures:

- Providers know how and when Veterans are added to the BNL
- Consents are in place when adding Veterans to BNL
- Providers understand the process used to update the BNL
- Data is updated in a timely manner
- Unsheltered Veterans have been identified and linked to emergency accommodations and are housed quickly
- Monitoring of inactivity protocol for BNL
- Minimum monthly data submissions are made by HMIS providers
- BNL inflow monitoring occurs
- Resource connections at inflow take place
- Review system equity dashboards, encourage provider use of equity dashboards
- Ensure co-enrollment processes are in place and reviewed every six months

APPROVED ENDING VETERAN HOMELESSNESS DOCUMENTS

The following documents below have been approved for use by the Ending Veteran Homelessness Committee and Grand Rapids Area Coalition to End Homelessness.

[MAINTAINING USICH FEDERAL CRITERIA AND BENCHMARKS TO ENDING VETERAN HOMELESSNESS COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT FORM](#)

[ENDING VETERAN HOMELESSNESS WORKGROUP COMMITTEMENT](#)

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