

# **Maine Homeless Veteran Action Committee**

The Veteran Committee of the  
Maine Continuum of Care

## **Written Standards**

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## I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### A. Background and Mandate

The Maine Homeless Veterans Action Committee (ME HVAC), the Veteran Committee of the Maine Continuum of Care (MCOC), formed as a collaboration of several agencies and organizations to ensure that Veteran homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring and was adopted as a joint committee of the MCOC in 2016. As the veteran committee of the of the MCOC, ME HVAC must establish and consistently follow written standards for providing assistance consistent with Subtitle C of Title IV of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and MCOC Governance & Structure, 2017. These written standards are to include:

1. Policies and procedures for evaluating an individual veteran or veteran family's eligibility for assistance for participating programs.
2. Policies and procedures for determining and prioritizing which eligible individual veterans or veteran families will receive assistance from VA Supportive Housing (HUD VASH) or other permanent supportive housing, Grant and Per Diem (GPD) or other transitional housing assistance, and Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) or other rapid re-housing assistance when specific resource capacity is limited.

The ME HVAC effort to ensure that homelessness among veteran families is rare, brief and non-recurring is in accordance with the vision adopted by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) on what it means to end all homelessness. Achievement of ME HVAC's goal will be measured using the USICH, Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) developed [criteria and benchmarks](#) for ending Veteran homelessness and tracked using a by-name list of all veterans experiencing homelessness.

### B. Goals of the Written Standards

As a subcommittee of the MCOC, the ME HVAC recognizes and supports HUD's goals for its local written standards and strives to meet its obligations under the HEARTH Act in a way that helps to enhance its coordinated response to veterans who experience homelessness as a sub-population within the broader homeless population and a subordinate effort to community wide homeless coordinated entry. These standards hereby:

1. Establish community-wide expectations on the operations of projects serving the Veterans experiencing homelessness.
2. Ensure that the prioritization of limited community resources is transparent to users and operators
3. Establish guidelines for the maintenance of the veteran by-name list and the case consultation which addresses the needs of veterans identified on the by-name list.
4. Establish minimum training standards on the community response to veteran homelessness.

The ME HVAC agrees that these standards must be applied consistently across the entire State while also taking into consideration individual local or county-specific needs and resources.

Furthermore, these standards recognize the unique geography of Maine and accommodate the unique needs and service availability of each respective county as well as the policy of allowing individuals and families choices in where and how they receive services and housing resources.

## **C. Guiding Principles**

The ME HVAC commits to the following Guiding Principles as part of its overall approach to ending and preventing veteran homelessness across the MCOC.

### **1. Housing First**

Housing First is an evidence-based, cost-effective approach to ending homelessness for the most vulnerable and chronically homeless individuals. The Housing First model prioritizes housing and then assists the Veteran with access to healthcare and other supports that promote stable housing and improved quality of life. The model does not try to determine who is “housing ready” or demand treatment or other support services as preconditions to housing. Instead, treatment and other support services are wrapped around Veterans as they obtain and maintain permanent housing.

Consistent with VA and HUD COC guidance, the ME HVAC looks to promote housing first principles across Maine’s programs that serve veterans experiencing homelessness.

### **2. Non-Discrimination**

Consistent with the MCOC, ME HVAC commits to a policy of non-discrimination. Elements of this principle include:

- a) Providers must have non-discrimination policies in place and reach out to people least likely to engage in the homeless system.
- b) Providers must comply with all federal statutes including the Fair Housing Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- c) ME HVAC members practices a person-centered model that strongly incorporates participant choice and inclusion of subpopulations present in Maine’s veteran families including, but not limited to: youth; families with children, victims of domestic violence and LGBTQ persons.
- d) ME HVAC is committed to abiding by the Equal Access to Housing in HUD Programs – Regardless of Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity Final Rule published in 2012 and the subsequent Final Rule under 24 CFR 5 General HUD Program Requirements; Waivers, September 2016.

### **3. Client Choice**

Given the geography of Maine, the ME HVAC strives to ensure that clients seeking assistance are provided choice in the types and duration of services they receive, dependent on available resources.

This choice is limited to the prioritization strategies outlined in this document, with fair discretion where possible. To the degree possible based on eligibility criteria, resources and the prioritization mechanisms described in this document, and where safety is not compromised, clients are given choice in:

- a) The type of services they receive by whom and over what time period
- b) The location and type of housing they access
- c) The elements and goals of their housing stability plans

#### **4. Progressive Engagement**

Progressive Engagement is an approach to helping households end their homelessness as rapidly as possible, despite barriers, with the appropriate level of assistance based on assessment and reassessment of need. More supports are offered to those households who struggle to stabilize and cannot maintain their housing without assistance. The Progressive Engagement approach recognizes that:

- a) there is no way to accurately predict how much help someone may need to end their homelessness and avoid a return to the streets or shelter.
- b) While we know that many people can successfully exit homelessness and avoid immediately returning with a small amount of assistance, we also know that there are no dependable predictors to guide the amount of assistance needed.

Programs using Progressive Engagement regularly re-assess housing barriers. Assistance is provided on an “as-needed basis” to keep a participant housed and, within funding constraints, programs offer more intensive support, additional rental assistance, or step-up referrals and help to access community-based assistance. ME HVAC members commit to a willingness to assess and reassess interventions for veteran families to ensure that interventions are client specific and appropriate in scope.

## **II. ME HVAC COMMITTEE STRUCTURE AND MEETING GUIDELINES:**

As a committee of the Maine Continuum of Care (MCO), the ME HVAC adheres to the standards laid out in July 2017 Revised Governance & Structure of the MCO (Attachment A). In accordance with this governance the ME HVAC has three officer positions, chair, co-chair and secretary. Officers will be elected annually at the February HVAC meeting. The ME HVAC officers are responsible for ensuring that the responsibilities of the committee as defined by the COC are fulfilled:

1. Actively engaged in the Maine’s Coordinated Entry System with the COC.
2. Update COCs on BNL progress (as agreed upon by all parties).
3. Prioritizing and matching Veterans to housing and services.
4. Manage and update Veterans By-Name-List (BNL).
5. Actively participate in local COC meetings.
6. Ensure privacy, release of information, and consent protocols are in place to project Veteran information as contained on the BNL (per individual agency and organization requirements).

7. Stay abreast of current initiatives pertaining to ending and preventing homelessness for Veterans.

ME HVAC has open membership for all individuals and/or organizations that have an interest in and subscribe to the mission and policies of the MCOC and the ME HVAC standards and policies laid out here. ME HVAC business is conducted through two different meetings, a monthly steering meeting and weekly case consultation meetings. On committee matters that require a vote, each organization or individual who is unaffiliated with an agency will get one vote. In order to be eligible to vote, a member organization or individual must have attended 50% of the scheduled ME HVAC steering meetings in the prior 12 months. Other conditions or definitions related to membership or voting are in accordance with and laid out in the MCOC Governance.

### **A. Steering Meeting**

A steering meeting will be held monthly on the first Tuesday of the month from 1pm to 3pm at a location agreed to by committee members. This meeting is open to the public and primarily focuses on:

1. Providing updates on programs that serve homeless veterans
2. Provide updates to the veteran community on happenings across the COC
3. Engage in community planning around achieving the end of veteran homelessness
4. Engage in community planning around the implementation of coordinated entry for veterans

### **B. Case Consultation**

Case consultation occurs weekly on all Tuesdays except the first Tuesday of the month when the steering meeting is held. During case consultation, community providers collaborate to identify newly homeless veterans identified by the provider community and develop permanent housing plans for each homeless veteran in Maine. This meeting is closed to the public and can only be attended by HVAC members who are participants in HMIS data sharing and/or included on the Veteran By-Name List release of information attached here. For an agency to be added to case consultation, the Veteran By-Name List release of information would need to be updated. Updates to the form are approved by majority vote on an annual basis at the November steering meeting.

## **III. ME HVAC VETERAN COORDINATED ENTRY, ASSESSMENT & BY-NAME LIST MANAGEMENT**

### **A. General Description**

The goal of ME HVAC is to ensure that homelessness among veterans is rare, brief and nonrecurring and it is recognized that participation in the process established here represents the best evidence based approach to meet this goal and achieve the USICH Benchmark Criteria for ending veteran homelessness. To achieve these goals, ME HVAC members commit to:

- a) MCOC implementation of statewide Coordinated Entry System (CES),
- b) veteran specific coordinated entry and permanent housing plan assessment

- c) maintenance of an accurate Veteran By-Name List.
- d) Participation in weekly case consultation

## **B. Coordination with Maine Continuum of Care Coordinated Entry System**

As the veteran subcommittee of the COC, ME HVAC collaborates with the state-wide Coordinated Entry System (CES). ME HVAC commits to integrate veteran coordinated entry and assessment into the statewide coordinated entry for person experiencing homelessness. ME HVAC assists statewide coordinated entry through the following:

- a) Rapid outreach for those experiencing homelessness who report veteran status to determine military service history and homeless veteran specific program eligibility.
- b) Quickly navigating those with documented military service to appropriate housing resources based on eligibility, program capacity, client vulnerability and client choice.
- c) By allocating resources based on veteran vulnerability and veteran preference so that when a Veteran becomes homeless, it is rare, brief and nonrecurring.
- d) Collaborate closely with other Maine's homelessness response systems and providers.
- e) Enter veterans into statewide coordinated entry utilizing the systems, policies and protocols adopted by the MCOC.

More detailed guidelines regarding ME HVAC's participation in statewide coordinated entry can be found in the attached policy and procedure.

## **C. By Name List Management**

Updates submitted by providers will be compiled on the ME HVAC Master By-Name List. This Master By-Name List will be maintained by an elected member of the ME HVAC leadership—chair, co-chair or secretary. This individual is also responsible for coordinating and facilitating weekly case consultation. More detailed guidelines and process for ME HVAC Veteran Coordinated Entry, Program Prioritization and Assessment and By-Name List Management can be found in the attached Policy and Procedure.

## **D. Homeless Veteran Service Coordination**

When a veteran individual or veteran family is identified by a member agency, they will be rapidly outreached and engaged to coordinate services of their choice. Coordination of outreach for identified veterans will be handled in real time and through weekly case consultation. Veterans will be assessed for vulnerability using the Vulnerability Index-Services Prioritization and Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) and/or a VA Homeless Assessment. The results of these assessments will be used in conjunction with chronic status individualized provider case presentation and client choice to determine a timely appropriate permanent housing intervention.

The ME HVAC will track coordination of housing services for veterans using the USICH By-Name List and Benchmark Generation Tool. The ME HVAC member agency who identifies the veteran is responsible for making the initial report to the Veteran By-Name List for coordination of outreach and housing assessment. Through client choice and case consultation, the client's primary provider for permanent housing search will be identified and recorded on the by name list. This provider is then

responsible for providing updates on housing search and placement. The primary housing support provider is responsible for:

- a) Ensuring the client has completed appropriate HMIS data sharing releases and agency releases to allow for case consultation and reporting to the Veteran By-Name List.
- b) Actively participating in weekly ME HVAC case consultation
- c) Providing weekly updates to data recorded on the By-Name List for each of their clients

## **E. Vacancy Updates**

All ME HVAC member agencies will report out on vacancies of housing units, HUD VASH case management openings, transitional housing beds and VA contract beds to HVAC during weekly case consultation.

## **F. Provider Intake Decline**

ME HVAC Committee members will provide proper notice to clients regarding denial of a permanent housing or transitional housing application. Members also adopt here that they will provide notification to the ME HVAC members when a client is denied an intervention. An intake denial notification will include, at a minimum, the following details, if applicable:

1. The reason the client cannot enter the program, including the reason for rejection by the client or provider
2. Instructions for appealing the decision, including the contact information for the person to whom and under what time frame the appeal should be submitted

## **G. Client Program Exit and By Name List Record**

Every effort will be made by ME HVAC committee members to avoid exiting veterans or veteran families from a program into homelessness. If a client is at risk of being exited from a program into homelessness the primary housing support provider will bring the client's case to weekly case consultation at least 30 days prior to exiting the client. During case consultation the ME HVAC committee will establish a community outreach plan to attempt to reconnect with the client over the next 30 days. If a client must be exited from a program into homelessness, the ME HVAC is still responsible for bi-weekly engagement and offers of an alternative permanent housing intervention consistent with the USICH Benchmark Criteria.

Clients who cannot be located by community providers, after 90 days of attempting to find the client, the client can be classified as inactive-missing on the Veteran By-Name List. Attempts to find the client must be made every two weeks during the 90 days preceding removal.

# **IV. PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING ELIGIBILITY AND PRIORITIZATION**

## **A. HUD VASH Eligibility and Prioritization**

HUD-VASH is a collaborative program between HUD and VA combines HUD housing vouchers with VA supportive services to help Veterans who are homeless and their families find and sustain permanent housing.



All referrals to permanent supportive housing will be made through the coordinated entry system following the attached policy and procedure and consistent with the prioritization criteria laid out here.

In Maine, Portland Housing Authority and Maine Housing administer Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) rental assistance. The VA Maine Healthcare System provides community based case management to connect Veterans with support services such as health care, mental health treatment and substance use counseling to help them in their recovery process and with their ability to maintain housing in the community. HUD VASH services strive to using a Housing First approach with clients who meet eligibility and chose to enroll in HUD VASH case management.

To be eligible for HUD VASH veterans must meet the following minimum eligibility requirements:

1. Eligible for Healthcare through the VA Maine Healthcare System
2. Meet the McKinney definition of homelessness
3. Have a VA identified clinical need
4. Be willing to engage in case management services through the VA
5. Cannot be on a state or federal sex offender registry

In addition to the above minimum eligibility criteria, the Maine HVAC prioritizes referrals to the HUD VASH program based on client's homelessness history and chronicity, identified clinical need and/or vulnerability level as defined by the VI-SPDAT. For a veteran to be considered for VASH in Maine, the veteran must be evaluated using the Coordinated Entry and Assessment process. Additional prioritization factors include:

1. Scoring an 8 or above on the VI-SPDAT
2. Historical factors including prior engagement and returns to homelessness after a Supportive Services for Veteran Families Rapid Rehousing intervention.
3. Community clinical assessment
4. Rapid Rehousing case manager

## **B. Other Permanent Supportive Housing Eligibility and Prioritization**

The ME Homeless Veteran Action Committee does not determine eligibility or prioritization for non-veteran specific permanent supportive housing. The Homeless Veteran Action Committee strives to collaborate with other COC programs and permanent supportive housing providers to find permanent supportive housing interventions that meet the needs of homeless veterans that are ineligible for VASH.

## **V. RAPID REHOUSING ELIGIBILITY AND PRIORITIZATION**

### **A. Supportive Services for Veteran Families Eligibility and Prioritization**

Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) is a Department of Veterans Affairs grant administered to local agencies to provide short term case management, limited financial assistance and navigation of community resources for veterans experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. Veterans families eligible for Rapid Rehousing through SSVF must meet the following minimum eligibility criteria:

1. A veteran in the household with 1 day of active duty not for training.
2. Income below 50% of the area median income as defined by HUD

3. Currently homeless to include staying in an emergency shelter, transitional housing or a place not meant for human habitation; or at risk of literal homeless within 30 days.

In Maine, SSVF is administered by Preble Street's Veteran Housing Services and Veteran's Inc. Both programs serve all sixteen counties. In addition to providing case management services to households who meet eligibility. SSVF mandates that grantees provide community outreach to identify veteran households.

Households that meet minimum eligibility will be prioritized for SSVF based on the following criteria.

1. A household VI-SPDAT score 7 or below
2. A household with a VI-SPDAT score of 8 or above where a HUD VASH intervention is not available and a rapid rehousing intervention should be offered acknowledging the principles of progressive engagement

## **B. Other Rapid Rehousing Eligibility and Prioritization**

The ME Homeless Veteran Action Committee does not determine eligibility or prioritization for non-veteran specific rapid rehousing programs. The Homeless Veteran Action Committee strives to collaborate with other COC programs and rapid rehousing providers to find rapid rehousing interventions that meet the needs of homeless veterans that are ineligible for SSVF.

# **VI. Transitional Housing Eligibility and prioritization**

## **A. Grant and Per Diem Eligibility and Prioritization**

Grant and Per Diem (GPD) is the Department of Veterans Affairs Transitional Housing program. The purpose is to provide community based supportive housing and/or supportive services with the goal of helping homeless veterans achieve residential stability, increase their skill levels and/or income. GPD providers are required to administer their programs in line within [one or more modalities](#) outlined by the VA. The options include, Bridge Housing, Low Demand, Hospital to Housing (Respite Care), Clinical Treatment, Service Intensive and Service Centers. The stated goal of these modalities is for GPD programs to be more closely aligned with the principles of housing first.

In Maine, there are three Grant and Per Diem sites managed by two providers. Each site follows a different treatment modality which dictates eligibility and prioritization.

### **1. Volunteers of America of Northern New England**

- a. Veterans Career House, located in Biddeford, ME** is a shared living environment for male, homeless Veterans with a specific diagnosis related to a substance use disorder and/or a mental health diagnosis. Veterans must actively choose to engage in clinical services. Clinically focused treatment is provided in conjunction with services effective in helping homeless Veterans secure permanent housing and increase income through benefits and/or employment.
- b. The Huot House, located in Saco, ME** has 10 single efficiency apartments. Targeted Population – Male and Female homeless Veterans identified and evaluated in emergency

departments and inpatient care settings for suitability for direct transfer to transitional housing and supportive care.

- i. As a pre-requisite to GPD Hospital to Housing program placement Veterans
  - ii. Should have a post-discharge plan coordinating care with the medical center that addresses ongoing physical, mental health, substance use disorder and social work needs as well as care management plans to transition the Veteran to permanent housing upon clinical stabilization
  - iii. Must be able to perform independent Activities of Daily Living
  - iv. Must not require acute detox
  - v. Must have no apparent psychosis
2. **Veterans Inc. located in Lewiston, ME** has 2 programs for a total of 20 beds (male only). These beds follow two modalities:
  - a. Bridge Housing for homeless Veterans who have accepted a housing plan, with the expectation they can be housed in 90 days.
  - b. Service Intensive Transitional Housing for homeless Veterans. Vets Inc. serves those with histories of mental health and or substance abuse issues, as well as those struggling with poverty.

As members of ME HVAC and inline with the USICH Benchmark criteria, Maine's GPD programs commit to offers of a permanent housing intervention within the first 30 days a veteran enters a GPD program. For veterans who decide to decline a permanent housing intervention, GPD programs commit to providing housing counseling and an offer of permanent housing every two weeks.

## **B. Other Transitional Housing Eligibility and Prioritization**

The ME Homeless Veteran Action Committee does not determine eligibility or prioritization for non-veteran specific transitional housing programs. The Homeless Veteran Action Committee strives to collaborate with other COC programs and transitional housing providers to find transitional housing interventions that meet the needs of homeless veterans that are ineligible for GPD.

## **VII. HMIS & VETERAN BY-NAME LIST MANAGEMENT & PRIVACY GUIDELINES**

As a subcommittee of the Maine COC, members agencies of ME HVAC who enter data into the Homeless Management Information System must comply with the most recent HMIS Data Standards and minimum privacy guidelines as laid out by HUD and the Maine COC.

Providers who contribute confidential client information to the ME HVAC shared Veteran By-Name List commit to follow are responsible for ensuring appropriate client authorization is received before providing information to the Veteran By-Name List. Clients who do not authorize release of the Veteran By-Name List data elements will still be recorded on the list using initials.

## **VIII. ATTACHMENTS**

December 5, 2017