

***County of Los Angeles  
Homeless Initiative***



***Draft Recommended Strategies  
to Combat Homelessness***

Strategy <b>C5</b>	<b>Increase Income</b>
	<b>Establish a Countywide Veterans Benefits Advocacy Program for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness or At Risk of Homelessness</b> <i>(Related to Strategy Brief 3.5)</i>

Population Impact:  All  Families  TAY  Single Adult  Veteran  Chronically Homeless Adult

**Recommendation:**

Direct the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to contract for one or more Homeless Veterans Benefits Specialist Resource Teams as described below.

**Description:**

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs will contract for one or more Homeless Veterans Benefits Specialist Resource Teams to provide assistance to eligible homeless Veterans in applying for and obtaining income and/or health benefits from the Department of Veteran’s Affairs. The program will be operated in partnership with community-based organizations to: (1) provide wraparound case management, health, and mental health supports to house enrolled Veterans; and (2) acquire VA Service-Connected Compensation or VA Non-Service-Connected Pension benefits. The components of the proposed Veteran’s Advocacy Program include:

- A. VA Benefits Specialist Resource Teams serving all Service Planning Area (SPA) of the County, including VA will be responsible for the providing services including, but not limited to the following:
- Conduct and/or leverage outreach and engagement activities to identify eligible homeless Veterans;
  - Receive referrals from DPSS, DHS, DMH and other County departments of veterans who need assistance with veteran’s benefits;
  - Provide assessment and screening to determine whether Veterans meet requirements for VA Service-Connected and Non-Service-Connected benefits;
  - Coordinate with existing homeless entry points and housing programs to arrange subsidized housing or VASH Vouchers for those individuals enrolling in the program;
  - Access relevant medical records from medical providers based on the Veteran’s medical treatment, military service, and VA claims history;
  - Coordinate and leverage Veterans Health Administration, Los Angeles County Department of Military and Veterans Affairs “Navigator” program, Department of Mental Health, Department of Health Services, and managed care systems to assist the veteran to access health care, mental health care, and documentation of disability and, when applicable, its relationship to military service for Veterans completing a VA Service-Connected and/or Non-Service-Connected claim(s);
  - Develop and file high-quality benefits applications, including new and original, reopened, and increased rating claims;
  - Coordinate and advocate with the Veterans Benefits Administration regarding status of

<p>pending benefits applications and appeals, as well as scheduling of Compensation and Pension examinations;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate legal assistance to assist Veterans who have complex Service-Connected/Non-Service-Connected claims, including claims that require a character of discharge determination, claims that have been denied and are eligible to enter the appellate phase, and “clear and unmistakable error” claims; and</li> <li>• Coordinate benefits advocacy with the proposed countywide SSI Benefits Advocacy team, as needed.</li> </ul> <p>B. Ongoing Training and technical assistance for Veterans and homeless service agencies, Federally Qualified Health Centers, and County and other public agencies - Training and technical assistance will be conducted by a VA Accredited Agent and/or Attorney, and could be from the VA Benefits Specialist Team or through a subcontract to reach government and community organizations and clinicians that serve Veterans. Training and technical assistance should incorporate the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leverage training resources provided by the Supportive Services for Veterans Families program;</li> <li>• Train homeless service providers and public agencies on the identification of eligible homeless Veterans and the various Veteran military discharge statuses;</li> <li>• Train homeless service providers and public agencies on the process for assessment and screening to ensure Veterans meet the requirements for VA Service-Connected Compensation and Non-Service-Connected Pension; and</li> <li>• Provide ongoing training and support to physicians and clinicians on identifying potential applicants and completing Service-Connected and Non-Service-Connected documentation.</li> </ul> <p>C. Provide quality assurance to ensure the submission of high quality Service-Connected/Non-Service-Connected applications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access and monitor submitted Veterans claims in VA database systems;</li> <li>• Track and report programmatic outcomes; and</li> <li>• Pursue continuous improvement of training and coordination to assure high quality benefits support for homeless Veterans.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Population(s) Targeted/Other Categorizations:</b></p>
<p>Homeless veterans and those veterans at risk of homelessness in need of applying for and obtaining VA benefits or related services.</p>
<p><b>Potential Performance Metrics:</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The number of Veterans who initiate applications for VA benefits</li> <li>• The number of Veterans transitioned to the SSI Benefits Specialist Resource Team when expected VA benefits receipt would be less than the SSI/SSP rate</li> <li>• The number of VA/SSI/SSP claims that are approved</li> </ul>
<p><b>Funding:</b></p>
<p>\$1.2 million in Homeless Prevention Initiative funds out of the \$5 million approved for implementation of the Homes for Heroes report. Utilization of this funding for this strategy was already identified in the November 19, 2015 memorandum which provided the Board of Supervisors with the Homes for Heroes implementation plan.</p>

<b>Lead Department:</b>	<b>Collaborating Departments/Agencies:</b>
Military and Veterans Affairs	Community-Based Organizations Health Services Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority Mental Health Probation Veteran Service
<b>Connection to Cities:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Same <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complementary <input type="checkbox"/> No City Role	
Cities could support the County's efforts by encouraging local community medical facilities to expedite requests for medical records from the Countywide Veteran's Benefits Advocacy Program staff and/or provide funding to support advocacy efforts for their city's homeless veterans.	

Strategy <b>E1</b>	<p><b>Create a Coordinated System</b></p> <p><b>Advocate with Relevant Federal and State Agencies to Streamline Applicable Administrative Processes for SSI and Veterans Benefits</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Related to Strategy Brief 3.3)</i></p>
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**Population Impact:**  All    Families    TAY    Single Adult    Veteran    Chronically Homeless Adult

<b>Recommendation:</b>	
Direct the Chief Executive Office to advocate with relevant Federal and State agencies to streamline applicable administrative processes, in order to enhance access to SSI and Veterans benefits for applicants who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	
<b>Description:</b>	
<p>There is a significant opportunity to enhance access to SSI and Veterans benefits for applicants who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, through advocacy with the Social Security Administration, California Department of Social Services, Veterans Administration, Veterans Healthcare Administration, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and any other relevant agencies to streamline applicable administrative processes. Such streamlined processes have been implemented in the past and could now be reinstated and enhanced. Specific opportunities include, but are not limited to: (1) designating specialized local offices to handle SSI applications from County SSI Advocates; (2) exempting cases of homeless clients applying for SSI from being transferred throughout the country; and (3) collaboration with community-based organizations providing services to Veterans/SSI applicants.</p> <p>Advocacy is needed with the following Agencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Security Administration- Administers Supplemental Security Income;</li> <li>• California Department of Social Services Disability Determination Services – Reviews medical records as part of the SSI application process;</li> <li>• Veterans Administration- Oversees the provision of Veterans benefits;</li> <li>• Veterans Healthcare Administration – Oversees the provision of Veterans Healthcare services; and</li> <li>• California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation - Oversees State prison operations.</li> </ul>	
<b>Population(s) Targeted/Other Categorizations:</b>	
All homeless populations	
<b>Potential Performance Metrics:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Processing time for SSI and Veteran’s benefits</li> <li>• Approval rate for SSI and Veteran’s benefits</li> </ul>	
<b>Funding:</b>	
There is no cost to the County to implement this strategy.	
<b>Lead Department:</b>	<b>Collaborating Departments/Agencies:</b>
Chief Executive Office	Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority

	Health Services Military and Veterans Affairs Public Social Services United Way/Home for Good Community-Based Organizations
<b>Connection to Cities:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Same <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complementary <input type="checkbox"/> No City Role	
Cities could support the County's effort through the League of Cities and/or Independent Cities Association. Individual cities could also support this effort.	