



# MINNESOTA INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS

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**To:** Ben Hecker and Abdi Muse, Mayor’s Office, City of Minneapolis  
**From:** Eric Grumdahl, Special Advisor on Ending Veteran Homelessness  
**Copy:** Cathy ten Broeke, Statewide Director to Prevent and End Homelessness  
 Mikkel Beckmen, Director, Office to End Homelessness  
**Re:** Progress on Veteran homelessness and recommendations for Mayoral engagement

This briefing memorandum provides background information on Veteran homelessness in Minneapolis for our meeting later this morning. I look forward to the discussion.

### Progress Ending Veteran Homelessness

To accelerate our pace ending Veteran homelessness and provide critical performance data about our progress, the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs created the Minnesota Homeless Veteran Registry – a by-name list of every Veteran experiencing homelessness in Minnesota. Veterans can join the Registry by calling 888-LinkVet or by working with local service providers to complete an application. In the application process, Veterans are asked for their consent to have information about their housing needs shared with a team of service providers who work together to coordinate care and access to housing. In Hennepin and Ramsey counties, a team of 20 people from a dozen organizations meets every two weeks to create a housing plan for every Veteran on the Registry.

Since its launch in December, nearly 500 Veterans have joined the Registry statewide. A total of 150 Veterans who joined the Registry have been housed. The overwhelming majority of Veterans on the Registry (85 percent) are in Hennepin and Ramsey counties. Within both counties, Veterans on the Registry reside almost exclusively in the central cities.

There are currently 321 Veterans registered in Hennepin County, 206 of whom remain homeless. Of these 206, 40 are currently unsheltered and most (146) qualify as long-term or chronically homeless.

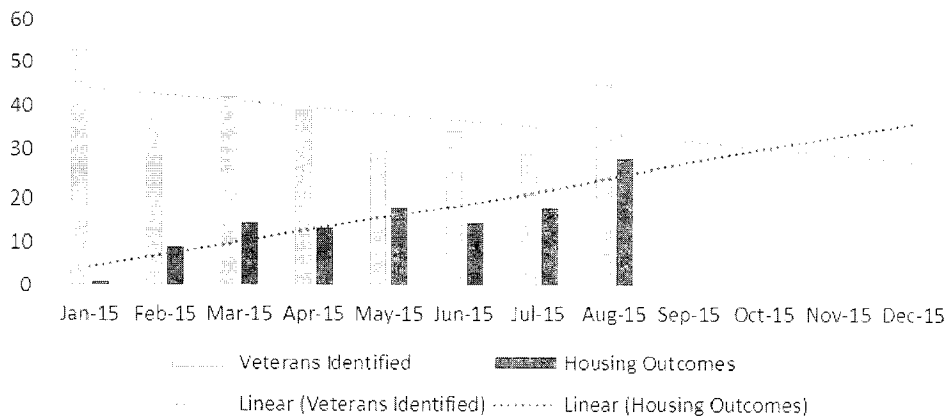
Month	Veterans Identified	Housing Outcomes	Gap
Dec-14	11		11
Jan-15	53	1	52
Feb-15	37	9	28
Mar-15	42	14	28
Apr-15	39	13	26
May-15	31	18	13
Jun-15	34	14	20
Jul-15	29	18	11
Aug-15	45	28	17
	321	115	206

Prior to this month, we had been on a pace that soon would have meant that the number of Veterans housed each month exceeded those identified. Reaching this milestone is a critical step toward achieving the goal, representing the “turning of the tide” where ongoing progress – if sustained – would gradually reduce the overall population of Veterans experiencing homelessness toward zero. *Until the pace of housing outcomes exceeds the pace of identification, we will not achieve the goal.*

On August 4 - 5, the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans (MACV) held its annual Stand Down event at

Fort Snelling. This event is intended to reach out to Veterans and connect them with a broad range of services, many of which are represented on site. MACV obtained 83 Registry applications at this event. Of these, 18 were already on the Registry, and between 24 – 34 are likely not eligible for the Registry because they are not currently homeless. Even so, this represents a significant increase in the number of Veterans identified in a single month compared to our recent trends.

Veterans Identified and Housed on the Homeless Veteran Registry (Hennepin County only)



Based on the latest data, we might not reach that turning point until October. There are, however, a variety of new efforts that may help accelerate current progress further. First, the Minneapolis VA Medical Center has been working closely with public housing agencies, including MPHA, to expedite the pace of Veterans accessing HUD-VASH, a key program for Veterans with long histories of homelessness. Second, at the beginning of August, Hennepin County challenged providers in one of its largest supportive housing programs to identify at least 70 housing options for Veterans between now and the end of the year. We are already seeing significant impact from these new options. Finally, Hennepin and Ramsey counties also recently agreed to target new vacancies in a regional supportive housing program for people with long histories of homelessness to serve Veterans.

We have also identified three cohorts of Veterans for whom housing outcomes are proving most challenging, regardless of available options: Veterans with significant criminal histories (especially recent violent offenses or sex offenses); Veterans with chronic and “chaotic” substance abuse problems; and Veterans with untreated mental health conditions. For the latter two groups, outreach workers find that even with an available housing option (e.g., a waiting apartment), the Veteran may not be in a position to offer meaningful consent to sign a lease at any time we can engage them. Housing solutions for these Veterans will likely require extraordinary persistence and continuous engagement.

The key take-aways are: projections for the end of the year are volatile. The goal *remains achievable* this year, but will require significant new efforts (including those above) to reach on schedule. We have identified some Veterans who will be the very most challenging to house.

**Potential Mayoral Engagements**

To help spur progress, I suggest we discuss the following three engagement opportunities.

First, access to landlords who are willing to accept Veterans with blemishes on their rental histories remains the single most important bottleneck to progress housing Veterans. Facing a similar challenge with access to landlords, U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary McDonald and Los Angeles Mayor Garcetti hosted a "Housing for Heroes" breakfast rally, aimed at identifying landlords willing to provide 1,000 housing options for Veterans. We believe a similar event hosted by Mayor Hodges and Mayor Coleman, and perhaps including a dignitary from Washington, could be helpful to our effort. Mayor Coleman has already agreed to participate.

In assessing options to identify more landlords, we have also learned that concerns about Fair Housing complaints or violations may serve as an impediment to greater landlord participation. As one landlord put it, landlords may be concerned that if they allow a Veteran through their screening process in a way that others are not, this could yield Fair Housing complaints that can incur significant legal costs, even if they are vindicated in court. To help address these barriers, some tools for landlords (e.g., sample screening exception processes and forms) and guidance (e.g., recommendations about how to affirmatively accept Veterans while complying with Fair Housing requirements) would be helpful. As these materials are developed, it would be helpful to have them issued through the City's lists of property owners, ideally with the City of Minneapolis' imprimatur. The Mikkel Beckmen in the Office to End Homelessness has already brokered this option with Luther Krueger, the manager of the City's registered property owners list, once we have materials ready to distribute.

Second, the HUD-VASH voucher program, pairing VA case management services with a rent subsidy administered by public housing agencies (PHAs), remains one of the most important tools in our effort to end Veteran homelessness, especially for Veterans experiencing chronic homelessness. I believe there are some improvements to this program that are possible, which may require greater engagement between the Mayor's Office and MPHA.

Third, we continue to see challenges within the existing portfolio of housing options for Veterans, in terms of which Veterans are able to access these resources. It would be worthwhile to discuss how targeted outreach to some of our partners from the Mayor's Office may be helpful in terms of ensuring that these housing resources are used wisely.

We look forward to discussing these points and more with you today. Thank you, as ever, for your partnership.