



Joint Report on Veterans Housing Programs December 2022

[House Bill 2530 \(2019\)](#) directed the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) and Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) to submit jointly to the House Interim Committee on Veterans and Emergency Management an annual report on veterans housing programs that include:

1. Expenditures relating to veterans housing programs, including how money was expended and the source of the money.
2. Programs or initiatives to enroll veterans in or inform veterans of existing housing programs.
3. Implementation of programs and training for the identification of veterans who are or may become homeless.
4. Training of and coordination with state and local agencies on veterans' housing programs, including "Operation Welcome Home."

Background

More than 277,000 veterans are living in Oregon today. Oregon's veterans are a rich and diverse community, spanning four generations with service in five major wars. Oregon veterans are as diverse as the state itself, representing a range of ethnicities, gender identities, and religious beliefs.

Between 2021 and 2022, the number of sheltered veterans decreased nationally by 10%. This represents the largest one-year decline since 2015–16. In 2021, 19,750 veterans were experiencing sheltered homelessness, according to the 2021 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR)¹ to Congress, representing 8% of all sheltered adults experiencing homelessness. This national decline was not seen in Oregon. Sheltered veterans accounted for 27 out of every 10,000 in Oregon, with Oregon on the rise for the highest rates of all veterans experiencing sheltered homelessness¹.

No person who has served our nation should experience housing instability, but research indicates that veterans are more likely than nonveterans to experience homelessness, although the disparity is decreasing. California, Hawaii, and Oregon had the highest rates of homelessness among all veterans, far exceeding the national rate of 21 of every 10,000 veterans. The highest rate was in California, where 77 of every 10,000 veterans experience homelessness, followed by Hawaii and Oregon (54 and 50 of every 10,000 veterans)¹. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development AHAR estimates that in Oregon, there are more than 1,300 veterans experiencing homelessness on any given night, and 51% of these veterans are unsheltered. Oregon's Homeless Information Management System (HMIS) estimates the number to be closer to 1,700 veterans experiencing homelessness.

Veteran homelessness is not isolated to the state's urban centers; in fact, the rate of veteran homelessness in rural Oregon is quickly outpacing rates in metropolitan areas. OHCS and ODVA—with many other partners—are working closely to address these critical issues that impact Oregon's veterans.

Ending veteran homelessness and supporting housed veterans requires collaboration between governments, veterans service agencies and providers, quality data, and a collective commitment to addressing the crisis.

¹ <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2021-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

State Investments in Veterans Housing

OHCS works to serve veterans across the housing stability spectrum. Three OHCS programs receive funding from the Document Recording Fee (DRF): the General Housing Assistance Program (GHAP), the Emergency Housing Account (EHA), and the Home Ownership Assistance Program (HOAP). Of these funds, 25% is earmarked in each program to serve Oregon veterans. In fiscal year 2021–22, OHCS received \$46,376,751.69 from the Document Recording Fee. A quarter of that, or \$11,594,187.92, is dedicated to veterans. The DRF and other federal and state funds support housing investments for veterans across the state.

Homeless Services Programs

ODVA Grants Addressing Houselessness

ODVA's Strategic Partnerships Division administers several grants, including the Oregon Veterans' Emergency Financial Assistance Grant, which provides funds that help address a broad spectrum of urgent needs, including those related to housing stability and houselessness. Grants are awarded to individual veterans experiencing urgent needs such as rental and mortgage assistance, utility payments, and vehicle repairs, among others.

The Strategic Partnerships Division also administers the Veterans Services Grant, which funds veterans service organizations, Tribes, counties, nonprofits that provide critical services to Oregon veterans. The Oregon Veterans Emergency Financial Assistance Program (OVEFAP), and the Veteran Educational Bridge Grant can provide additional resource opportunities. ODVA is committed to enhancing partnerships and coordinating with program providers to meet the unique and urgent needs of houseless veterans and provide the means to deliver critical services to Oregon veterans.

Emergency Housing Assistance

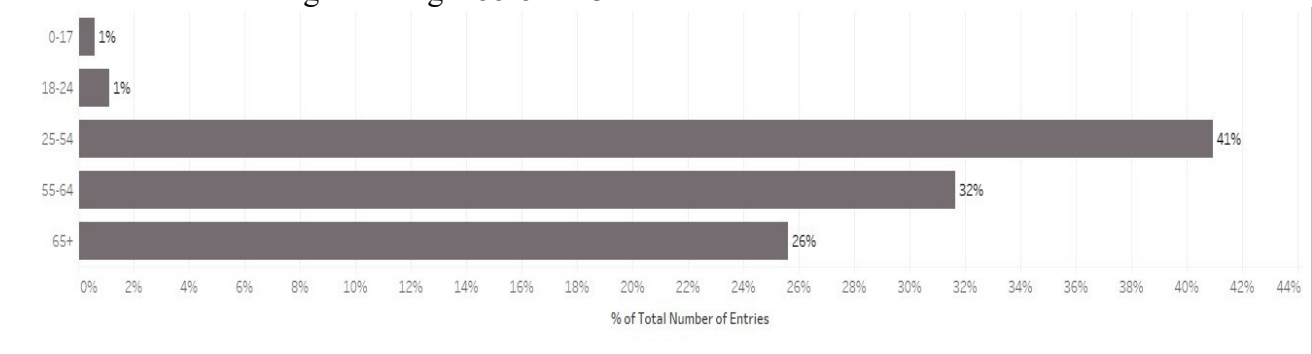
The Emergency Housing Assistance Program (EHA) assists low- or very low-income persons who are homeless or unstably housed and at risk of becoming homeless. OHCS makes funds available through community action agencies across the state. To be eligible for this funding, an applicant must have served active duty, received a ribbon or medal for service and discharged or released under honorable conditions, or received a non-service-connected pension from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

During the 2021–22 fiscal year, OHCS served 655 veterans with Emergency Housing Assistance (EHA). OHCS homeless services programs combined served 1,628 veterans, a total of 3,503 times with programs that also include Emergency Rental Assistance, State Homeless Assistance Program, Emergency Solutions Grant, HOME Tenant Based Assistance and Out of the Cold resources.

Within the 655 veterans served with EHA dollars, 97 were women and 12 identified as transgender or non-binary. Comparing these numbers to last year, 6% of veterans served this year were female, down a percentage point from last year. For context, in FY2020–21, OHCS and our partners served 583 people. As detailed below, the largest group of veterans accessing services are those age 25–44, potentially veterans of the conflicts in the Middle East. While that is the largest individual group, there are many older veterans who connected with OHCS-funded services during FY2019, with 317 ages 60 and older. Veterans connecting with services funded by these programs during FY2020 were predominately male. There were also 83 female veterans who received assistance. One person identified as trans/non-binary, while several did not provide gender information.

Age Demographic Data of Veterans Served by EHA

The largest age group we see for veterans is between ages 25-54, making up 41% of veterans served by EHA dollars. Following that is ages 55-54 at 32%.



Racial Equity Outcomes for Oregon's Veterans in EHA

People of color make up 20% of veterans served by OHCS' homeless services programs, with folks who identify as multiple races being the primary category selected by veterans of color. This year, there was a decline in veterans who identified as Hispanic/Latino and veterans of color in general as well.

As part of OHCS' commitment to racial equity, the agency tracks race and ethnicity of those who served to ensure equitable reach of program resources. The largest group connecting with services were those in the category of non-Hispanic/Latino-White. There was also some diversity across the group, with 71 veterans indicating Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, 52 identifying as Black or African American, and 60 reporting as American Indian or Alaskan Native, and seven as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

Veterans Served by Race and Ethnicity

Race	Hispanic/Latino	Non-Hispanic/Latino	Unknown	Total	% of Total Race Who Are Veterans
American Indian/Alaska Native	6	12	0	18	3%
Asian	0	5	1	6	1%
Black/African American	2	36	0	38	6%
Multiple Races	7	57	0	64	10%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Island	0	3	0	3	1%
Race not known	3	2	12	17	3%
White	36	471	8	513	77%

Oregon's Total Veterans Population by Race and Ethnicity

All Veterans	White, Alone	Black or African American Alone	Asian	Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	Hispanic or Latino Alone	American Indian and Alaskan Native Alone	One or more other races
277,405	240,847	4,390	3,292	752	12,145	3,153	12,826
100.0%	86.8%	1.6%	1.2%	0.3%	4.4%	1.0%	4.6%

Energy Services Program

OHCS' Energy Services Section administers programs to provide services to support housing stability for people who are currently housed, such as assistance with energy expenses and weatherization of their homes. These resources—while not explicitly for veterans—provide critical support and resources to Oregon veterans. In FY2022, the Energy Assistance programs provided bill payment assistance to 4,220 veteran households, and weatherization programs provided energy efficiency and home health improvements to 80 veteran households. This is despite the fact that OHCS does not have funding directly set aside for veterans.

Veterans Affordable Rental Housing

The 2022 Veterans Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) allocated \$19.5 million in the form of grant funding from the General Housing Account Program (GHAP). GHAP provides 25% of account funds to developments that benefit veterans. This NOFA makes this set-aside available through a streamlined process for veterans housing developers. OHCS has supported the development of affordable rental housing specifically for veterans in Oregon. OHCS fully funded two projects from the 2022 NOFA cycle. All together, these projects will create 25 new, affordable rentals in deeply rural communities in eastern and southern Oregon to house veterans and provide 10 new OHCS-funded Permanent Supportive Housing homes. The project awards total \$7,601,500.

Project Name	County	Total Homes	PSH Homes	Sponsor
Freedom Square Apartments	Lake	10	10	BB Development, LLC
Veterans Village of Malheur County	Malheur	15		Northwest Equity Group
	Total	25	10	

Veterans Village of Malheur County is a new construction project that has 10 one-bedroom apartments and five two-bedroom apartments located in Ontario, Malheur County. The development is dedicated to serving five veterans experiencing homelessness. This project will serve a deeply rural community in Oregon. The project will provide on-site supportive services to its tenant population. To the project sponsors' knowledge, this will be the first veterans-specific affordable housing project in Malheur County.

Freedom Square Apartments is a new construction project that is a 10 one-bedroom apartment development in Lakeview, Lake County. The development is utilizing rental subsidy from OHCS PSH

Program for all 10 homes serving veterans experiencing chronic homelessness. Freedom Square Apartments is designed to serve and is committed to veterans experiencing chronic homelessness by providing permanent supportive housing to all units in the project. Two units in the project will be fully ADA-accessible.

Veteran Housing (YMCA)

During the 2019 Legislative Session, the Legislature authorized \$1 million of Measure 96 Lottery Funds for a one-time grant to the YMCA of Marion and Polk Counties to construct veterans' affordable housing in Salem. An additional \$6 million of lottery bond proceeds were also approved for a total grant to the YMCA of \$7 million. An additional \$2.74 million in donations have brought the total secured funding up to \$9.75 million. The project broke ground on June 15, 2022 and is now ahead of schedule with expected completion in summer 2023. This new veteran housing complex will have 34 units ranging from 401 square feet to just over 700 square feet each. It will have seven two-bedroom units and the remaining will be single bedrooms. The facility will provide wraparound services to further support long-term stability and access to supportive resources for veteran tenants as well as hire a full-time building service coordinator. Residents will also enjoy a free membership to the YMCA located across the street from the housing complex.

HOME American Rescue Plan (ARP)

Through the American Rescue Plan, Oregon received about \$33 million of one-time dollars from HUD under the HOME Investment Partnerships Program to provide housing and services to chronically homeless populations and households at risk of homelessness. Additionally, veterans and veteran households have been specifically identified as an eligible population for HOME ARP resources. In response to stakeholder feedback, OHCS is proposing to prioritize dollars to develop service-enriched housing in rural communities. The proposed HOME ARP Allocation Plan will be presented to the OHCS Housing Stability Council for approval on Friday, Dec. 2, 2022, and will then be submitted to HUD for final approval. OHCS is continuing to engage stakeholders in rural communities about how best to bring together HOME ARP capital dollars with rent assistance and services to create sustainable service-enriched housing for eligible HOME ARP populations. The agency expects to solicit for funds later in 2023.

Veteran Homeownership Opportunities

Oregon Bond Residential Loan

The Oregon Bond Residential Loan program provides 100% financing for federal VA home loans for first-time veteran homebuyers. OHCS began offering the veteran loan in 2018 and has since funded 93 loans, totaling \$23.5 million in loaned funds. In 2021, 18 veterans and their families secured an Oregon Bond Residential Loan totaling \$4.77 million in loaned funds.

HOAP Down Payment Assistance

In 2020, OHCS' Home Ownership Assistance Program (HOAP) awarded 13 organizations down payment assistance with up to \$15,000 per veteran who are first-time homebuyers and met the income qualification of earning below 100% area median income. Fifty-three veterans accessed down payment assistance totaling \$729,957.

The HOAP resources have been expanded to include serving surviving veterans' families. We acknowledge those families of service members and veterans who help shoulder the weight of war and

the burdens of sacrifice. To the mothers, fathers, spouses and children of our military men and women, the support you have provided is not forgotten.

OHCS is driving program enhancement to expand our current veterans Down Payment Assistance program further and communicating those improvements to all current lenders and our sister agencies, as well as in public messaging including on social media platforms. OHCS has also participated within the planning team of the Oregon Veteran Housing Network.

Next Steps

Improving Data to Improve Outcomes

HUD and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are pleased to announce they have jointly identified a solution for VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) to provide client-level HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) data from HOMES, VA's data collection and reporting system, to local Continuums of Care (CoCs) for importing into the local Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

OHCS has been working directly with CoCs and the VA to launch this new and unique data transfer. While the systems don't perfectly align, the providers are committed to refining and aligning data collection requirements in both HMIS and HOMES to improve this process. OHCS has recently agreed to a process with veterans getting a VASH voucher in the Marion County area. Instead of a local agency inputting that veteran into an HMIS, many times asking the veteran triggering or uncomfortable questions again, that information will be transferred from the VA HOMES system to our local HMIS system. This is a more trauma-informed process for the veteran, providing better data accuracy and process flow for on-the-ground workers. Once this method is fully implemented, OHCS can provide the same assistance to all CoCs in Oregon, ensuring a complete and more accurate picture of veterans' homelessness in Oregon moving forward.

Support for Homeless Veterans: Oregon Veteran Housing Network

The Oregon Veterans Housing Network is an interagency workgroup composed of Oregon Housing and Community Services, Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. This planning team has worked together to inform, support, and collaborate with Oregon's counties and organizations through virtual homeless veteran convenings. In 2022, in-person meetings were still being discouraged due to safety concerns, so this network's planning team continues to deliver resources, tools, and relevant information to over 1,100 veterans service providers within the network's membership. Virtual webinars were held and ranged on a variety of topics such as aging-veterans services and highlights from around the state on [innovative housing solutions](#).

ODVA's Role in Addressing Veteran Houselessness

ODVA's primary role in addressing veteran houselessness is preventive. At its best, the agency's work to help veterans access their earned federal VA benefits leads veterans to disability compensation, pension, and similar benefits that preempt the need to rely on back-end state safety nets. ODVA provides training, certification, and pass-through funding to the county and Tribal veteran service office (VSO) partners who perform the vast majority of direct-service claims work. ODVA's Appeals Team provides direct-service appeals work to veterans who disagree with the VA's decision on their disability, often resulting in

retroactive compensation to veterans.

In situations where a veteran is not yet houseless but is on the verge of becoming so due to short-term financial problems, ODVA directly administers the Oregon Veterans' Emergency Financial Assistance Program (OVEFAP). Other grant programs provide indirect support to houseless and near-houseless veterans by funding nonprofits and other agencies and organizations that provide a breadth of assistance related to veterans' needs.

Through these grant opportunities that are outlined in more detail below, ODVA demonstrates its commitment to enhancing partnerships and coordinating with program providers to meet the unique and urgent needs of houseless and near-houseless veterans and provide the means to deliver critical services to Oregon veterans.

ODVA Houseless Veterans Coordinator and Other Special Advocacy Coordinators

As a part of the Appeals and Special Advocacy Division, ODVA's houseless veterans coordinator, Eddie Maestas, is now entering his second year with ODVA. The program Maestas administers focuses on working with new and existing partners to develop the collaboration needed to provide more efficient means of directly serving Oregon's most vulnerable veterans with the ultimate goal of ending and preventing houselessness.

The houseless veteran coordinator is also certified as a veterans service officer recognized by the VA's Office of General Counsel to be able to work directly with veterans experiencing houselessness to provide both direct and indirect assistance to help individuals obtain and access earned veterans' benefits. This direct service support intersects with other ODVA advocacy programs such as incarcerated veterans, student veterans, women veterans, and veterans who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community.

ODVA has additional special advocacy coordinators whose work intersects with the issue of houselessness as well. Our women veterans coordinator, LGBTQ+ coordinator, incarcerated veterans coordinator, aging veterans coordinator and student veteran coordinator each work directly with veterans from across the diverse veteran population, some of whom need housing-related assistance. The network of resources that these special advocacy coordinators has, including being trained and certified veterans service officers themselves, is an important part of the work that ODVA does to include outreach to veterans. Outreach around available resources has been at the forefront of our engagement efforts. Maintaining strong relationships with partners to serve Oregon's veterans community is a shared priority and is met with intentionality.

ODVA has conducted outreach across Oregon, both virtually and in person, serving veterans and veteran service providers. Most notably, ODVA's houseless veteran coordinator and all of ODVA's special advocacy coordinators routinely conduct outreach during Veteran Stand Downs, which are community-level events with local homeless service providers, veterans service officers, as well as homeless services such as dental support for urgent needs. Other efforts include joining county-level workgroups, Housing Task Force groups, and informational presentations to veterans service officers, as well as county, Tribal, local governments, and nonprofits serving low-income and housing service providers serving veterans and their families.

Looking Ahead

OHCS and ODVA understand that 2023 will continue to bring unprecedented challenges. Much more needs to be done to ensure those that served our nation have a safe, stable, and affordable place to call home. Veteran housing instability is bigger than any one agency or organization. Ending it must continue to be a coordinated effort across Oregon at the state, federal, and local levels. We are committed and encouraged by the lessons learned through this work. We envision an Oregon where *no* veteran returns from service without somewhere to call home.