



Joint Report to the House Interim Committee on Veterans Veterans Housing Programs

December 2019

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

- (1) Expenditures relating to veterans' housing programs, including how moneys were expended and the source of the moneys.
- (2) Programs or initiatives to enroll veterans in or inform veterans of existing housing programs.
- (3) Implementation of programs and training for 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

There are approximately 300,000 veterans living in Oregon today. It is a rich and diverse community, spanning four generations with service in five major wars. Oregon veterans are men and women, young and old, urban and rural, gay, straight and transgender, and of every ethnicity and religious belief.

No person that served our nation should experience housing instability, but veterans are more likely than their civilian counterparts to experience homelessness. OHCS and ODVA work closely to address this critical issue that impacts around 1,400 Oregon veterans.

Funding and Expenditures for Veterans Housing

Document Recording Fee. OHCS works to serve veterans across the housing stability spectrum. Three OHCS programs receive funding from the Document Recording Fee: the General Housing Assistance Program (GHAP), the Emergency Housing Account (EHA), and the Homeownership Assistance Program (HOAP). Of these funds, 25% are earmarked in each program to serve Oregon veterans.

2017-19 Measure 96 Funds. In addition to the three programs supported by the document Recording Fee, during the 2017-19 biennium, OHCS received \$1.5 million in Measure 96 Lottery Funds for veterans' housing. These funds were used to support four key initiatives: emergency housing assistance (\$350,000); to fund affordable homes for veterans (\$781,118); to

fund a Veterans Housing Integrator position that works to connect organizations working to ensure veterans can access housing at all levels; and for “Operation Welcome Home,” a pilot initiative in ten communities in Oregon to establish the community infrastructure to end Veteran homelessness.

Veterans Affordable Housing. OHCS has supported the development of affordable rental housing specifically for veterans in Oregon. The 2017 Veterans Notice of Funding Availability committed money the following sources to funds this type of housing: \$8 million in General Housing Account Program Veterans funds (VGHAP), \$160,000 in General Housing Account Program, \$781,188 in Measure 96 Lottery Funds, and \$700,000 in Mental Health Housing funds.

Five developments received funding for veterans affordable rental housing, which also includes wrap-around services: Garfield Veterans Apartments in Portland; Pleasant Avenue Veterans Housing in Oregon City; Deer Spring Terrace in North Bend; Liberty Park Village in Klamath Falls; and Ash Creek Terrace Apartments in Independence. These projects represent 52 new homes in urban communities and 23 homes in rural communities. The use of the VGHAP was evenly split between urban and rural developments to ensure veterans across the state would benefit from these investments.

HOAP Down Payment Assistance. In the 2017-19 biennium, Homeownership Assistance Program (HOAP) veteran funds were used for down payment assistance and to support health and safety-related home rehab projects. Ninety-three veteran households were assisted with home rehab and repair projects for a total expenditure of \$1,207,079 (average household assistance was \$12,979). Seven veterans across six counties received down payment assistance through HOAP, totaling \$43,505 (average assistance of \$6,215).

Looking forward, an upcoming Request for Applications will make \$1.8 million in down payment assistance available to eligible veteran households, with up to \$15,000 available per household (a potential of 120 veterans assisted). In addition, in November 2018 OHCS expanded the Oregon Bond Residential Loan Program by offering 100% financing with Federal VA loans. To date, OHCS has funded 43 veteran loans totaling more than \$10.7 million (average loan of \$248,207).

Outreach to Veterans

OHCS continues to work with Community Action Agencies, the Association of Oregon Counties, the League of Cities, the Oregon Health Authority, and other state and federal agencies to increase awareness around veteran housing resources. While this is an ongoing effort, there are three recent examples of partnership projects that demonstrate the collaborated required to serve veterans.

In early September and October of 2019, the OHCS Veteran Housing Integrator attended several ODVA and the Oregon Health Authority Veteran Behavioral Health Study (see [key findings](#)) Debriefs to discuss the role mental health plays within the homeless community. This collaboration resulted in increased partnerships and opportunities for local collaborative work

and conversations between elected officials, law enforcement, Veteran Service Officers, and the local United States Department of Veteran's Affairs staff around veteran homelessness work.

During the Veteran Service Officer Annual State Conference in October, OHCS staff from the Energy Services Section, the Homeless Services Section, and the Homeownership Division presented on OHSC programs and local partners that deliver resources to veterans in need. This increased awareness of housing resources will not only increase access to veteran-specific resources, but it will also ensure Veteran Service Officer are able to make connections with their local Community Action Agency, Homeownership Center, and other providers.

In February, April, and October of 2019, OHCS partnered with the Association of Oregon Counties and Lake County Commissioners to facilitate a meeting of local service providers. The goal was to help identify and leverage resources to house veterans in their local area. As part of these conversations, a group of community partners learned of and applied for OHCS Permanent Supportive Housing Institute. The applicants, led by Lake Health District, were selected as part of the 2019 cohort (see [OHCS Press Release](#)).

Support for Homeless Veterans: Veteran Convenings

While one in fourteen Oregonians is a veteran, sadly, one in ten Oregonians experiencing homelessness has served in the military. To help move Oregon towards ending veteran homelessness, collaboration is the key. In partnership with ODVA, OHCS hosted three Veteran Convenings to spur collaboration and peer-to-peer learning.

The purpose of the convening is to bring everyone from front line staff to executive leadership, elected officials, state and federal partners, and those interested assisting and ending veterans' homelessness in Oregon together to share, learn, and collaborate on best practices. The major themes for the third convening were the six priorities from [Oregon's Statewide Housing Plan](#): Equity and Racial Justice, Homelessness, Permanent Supportive Housing, Affordable Rental Housing, Homeownership, and Rural Communities. While all priorities will advance housing opportunities for veterans, the Homelessness Priority calls out veterans as a target population.

Nearly 100 local leaders from across Oregon discussed shared resources, best practices, partnerships, and effective local strategies to house veterans experiencing homelessness. Attendees were inspired by Housing Stability Council Chair and ODVA Advisory Committee Member Adolf "Val" Valfre's kick-off speech. He highlighted recent investments in veteran services and affordable housing, and announced that Operation Welcome Home Communities successfully housed 587 veterans.

Sessions throughout the two-day convening included topics on the power of partnerships and building veteran communities, strategies local communities are using, and services and benefits for veterans. Attendees also participated in breakout groups discussing local best practices. This created peer-to-peer learning and provided an opportunity for lasting connections among local service providers.

The convening took place at the Independence Event Center July 30-31, 2019. The Veteran Convening ended with a celebration of Operation Welcome Home and an open house event of the Ash Creek Terrace Apartments, also in Independence. Funded in part with Measure 96 Lottery Funds, Ash Creek Terrace provides homes for veterans living with mental health or addiction issues.

Bringing Organizations Together to Support Veterans: “Operation Welcome Home”

On July 31, 2019, Oregon Housing and Community Services and the Oregon Department of Veterans’ Affairs concluded the eight-and-a-half-month-long campaign known as Operation Welcome Home. The short-term campaign helped ten communities, through technical assistance and support, to develop collaborative infrastructures with the long-term goal of ending veteran homelessness across Benton, Clackamas, Coos, Crook, Curry, Deschutes, Douglas, Jackson, Jefferson, Josephine, Klamath, Lane, Lake, Lincoln, Linn, Marion, Polk, and Yamhill counties.

Organizations partnered to set up an infrastructure to end veteran homelessness within their communities included federal programs, county veteran service officers, community action agencies, veteran organizations, local homeless shelters, community elected officials, and grassroots volunteer organizations.

Operation Welcome Home is funded through Measure 96 Oregon Lottery dollars allocated to improve outcomes for veterans by the 2017 Legislature, and supports local communities as they work to end veteran homelessness — a firm goal that Governor Kate Brown has made one of her administration’s top priorities.

Operation Welcome Home had three goals:

- (1) House 500 veterans across the ten communities.
- (2) Develop and implement a Veterans By-Name List.
Note: The Veteran By-Name List (VBNL) is a tool for providers to coordinate efforts to serve veterans experiencing homelessness. The list promotes collaboration across agencies in the community to efficiently connect Veterans to housing and supportive services.
- (3) Convene and deploy a Veterans Leadership Team to prioritize Veterans for services in the community.

When the initiative launched in November 2018, the collective goal was to house 500 veterans before the completion of the campaign. That goal was exceeded and, at last count, 587 homeless Oregon veterans now have a place to call home.

One veteran who found housing as part of this initiative is Mary (not her real name), who is a single mother of two young children. She experienced significant trauma during her military service and her life post-military hasn’t been easy. Earlier this year, Mary escaped from a violent domestic abuse environment.

Mary and her children survived, but they had nowhere to go. Mary felt that she was running out of options until her friend referred her to Central Oregon Veterans Outreach. They immediately connected her with housing and mental health resources. Now, Mary and her children can sleep comfortably with a roof over their heads.

Operation Welcome Home has had a transformative impact on not just the veterans served, but on their children, families, and community. Thanks to partnerships and leveraging shared resources, and thanks especially to the dedicated work of community partners, hundreds and even thousands of lives have been impacted through Operation Welcome Home.

Beyond the lives impacted in this short time-frame, Operation Welcome Home helped establish an infrastructure to better coordinate and assist veterans experiencing homelessness. Each of the ten participating communities created a veteran leadership team of community partners that serve veterans. These teams work together to identify the most holistic and timely resources for veterans, considering the unique needs of each veteran experiencing homelessness.

Operation Welcome Home also established veterans-by-name lists. These lists give key partners involved in ending veteran homelessness a solid understanding of the people (not just the numbers) that need to be housed at any given time. The list is used to determine where veterans are in the homeless system, who needs to be prioritized, what needs to be done to assist them, what barriers need to be removed to get them into housing, and who is responsible for each person.

More needs to be done, but the state agencies and community organizations recognize that we cannot do it alone. Veteran homelessness is bigger than any one organization, and addressing it needs to continue to be a coordinated effort across Oregon, at the state, federal, and local level. This broad, multi-agency, multi-sector partnership initiated through Operation Welcome Homes is a first important step.