



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

December 2020

[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 reflect a diverse range of ethnicity and religious beliefs.

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—with many other partners—work closely to address these critical issues that impacts Oregon veterans.

Ending Veteran homelessness and supporting housed veterans requires collaboration between veteran service agencies and providers, quality data, and a commitment addressing the crisis. Below you will find information on programs and expenditures to support veteran housing programs, COVID response efforts, and continued convening and peer sharing opportunities.

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.

Homeless Services Programs. OHCS Homeless Services Section administers programs to provide services to people experiencing homelessness and supporting housing

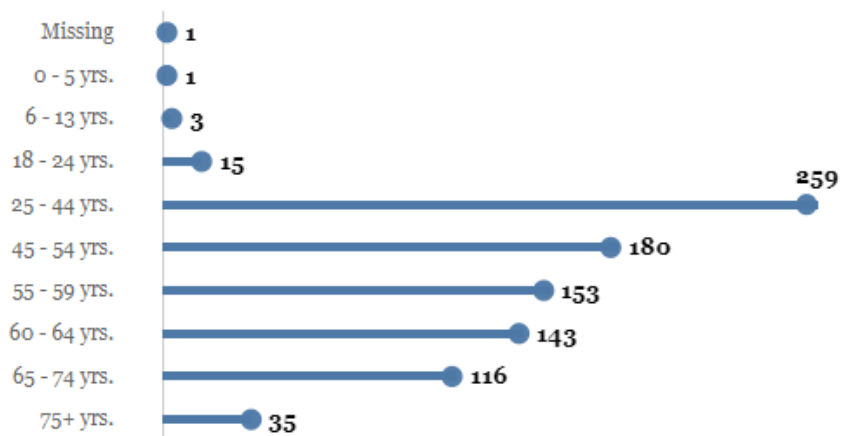


stability for people who are currently housed. These resources—while not explicitly targeted to veterans—provide critical support and resources to Oregon veterans who are a priority population for OHCS.

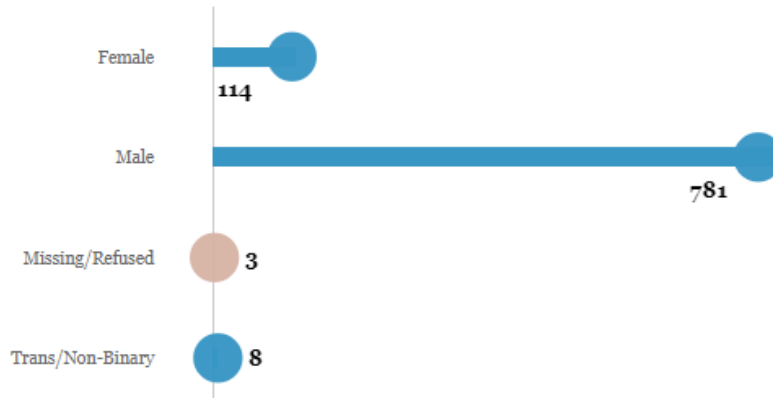
These programs include: Emergency Housing Assistance (EHA, 25% dedicated to Veterans), State Homeless Assistance Program (SHAP), Elderly Rental Assistance (ERA), and Housing Stabilization Program (HSP). A variety of services can be delivered with these programs including but not limited to shelter, transitional housing, homelessness prevention, rapid re-housing, and case management. Community Action Agencies (CAA) conduct outreach to veterans, work with other Veteran Service Providers in their communities, and participate in different venues to share best practices about supporting Veterans. In 2019 these programs combined served approximately 906 veterans. Of those 906 veterans, approximately 783 were in households consisting of adults with no minor children, and 131 were in households of adults with minor children.

The data below is from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), all HMIS systems are subject to rules set by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), as such the race/ethnicity and gender categories are those set by HUD. As all data sets do, this data set contains some errors. For example, you may notice that there are 5 ‘veterans’ under the age of 18. This is the result of some simple, but not unexpected errors. Improving data quality and the HMIS data entry process is critical to our continued understanding of veterans experiencing homelessness and housing instability. This data only represents an overall count of veterans served by the programs listed above and should be considered within the broader context of veterans’ programs and the homelessness system. Moving towards more integrated data sets across service providers is work that OHCS and partners are currently engaged in.

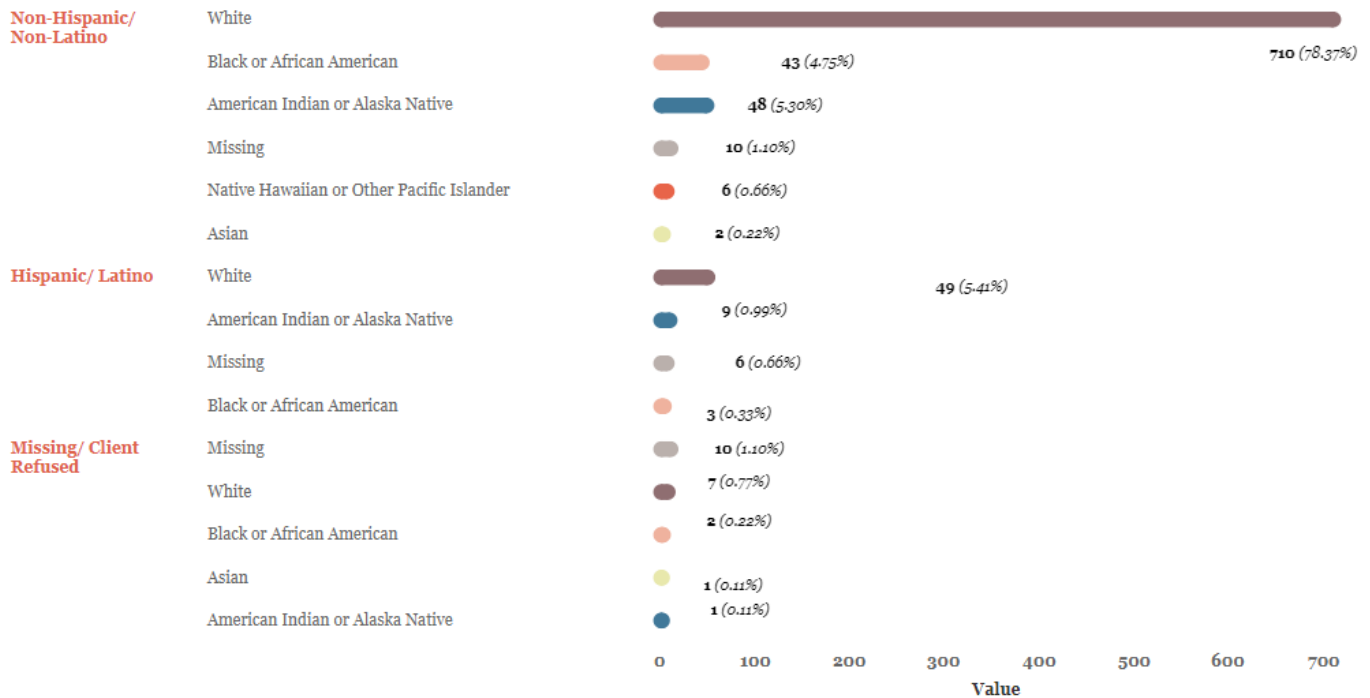
Age: We see here that of the veterans accessing services funded by these four OHCS programs the largest group is those age 25 – 44, potentially veterans of the conflicts in the middle east. While that is the largest individual group, there are many older veterans who connect with OHCS funded services during fiscal year (FY) 2019, with 294 ages 60 and older.



Gender: Veterans connecting with services funded by these programs during FY-2019 were predominately male. There were also 114 female veterans who received assistance, and several veterans identifying as trans/non-binary.



Race & Ethnicity: The largest group connecting with services were those in the category of Non-Hispanic/Latino - White. We also see some diversity across the group with 67 veterans indicating Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, 46 identifying as Black or African American, 57 reporting as American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 6 Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.



Data Next Steps: This is the first year that OHCS can observe data at the individual level across our programs. Two keys to ending veteran homelessness are the identification of veterans seeking services, and a specific approach to meeting the needs of each veteran. OHCS is hopeful that improved data and continued outreach efforts will position the State to make progress towards ending veteran homelessness. An additional step in this process will be working with veteran service partners to crosswalk data systems to identify not only veterans seeking assistance in our programs but throughout the state.

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 targeted to veterans—provide critical support and resources to Oregon veterans. The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Oregon Energy Assistance Program (OEAP) served 5,057 veteran households in FY 2019.

Veterans Affordable Housing. OHCS has supported the development of affordable rental housing specifically for veterans in Oregon. As part of the Small/Large Project 2019 Notice of Funding Availability, OHCS expanded this work by adding funds to projects that set aside homes for veterans. Of the 404 homes awarded, 87 new housing unit were dedicated to veterans across Oregon:

- Northwest Coastal Housing was provided funding to build **Blackberry Hill Apartments**. There will be 11 affordable rental homes serving veterans while providing greatly needed workforce housing in the Lincoln County coastal town of Toledo.
- The Klamath Falls Housing Authority will build the **Bridgeway Apartment** community, providing eight new permanent supportive housing (PSH) homes serving those experiencing severe and persistent mental illness with a priority for veterans.
- Luke-Dorf will build the **Douglas Fir Apartments**, a 15 home PSH development in Portland. This community will serve veterans, Native Americans, and low-income individuals who are homeless and/or diagnosed with severe and persistent mental illness. The project includes a Memorandum of Understanding with a culturally specific provider, as well as mental health services and case management through internal service teams.
- **Portsmouth Commons** is an innovative pilot project in Multnomah County that seeks to demonstrate a path for faith-based organizations to convert underutilized property into quality affordable housing for underserved populations. The Portsmouth Union Church is leading the development of these 20 new rental homes dedicated to serving homeless veterans from underserved communities. Project partners including Do Good Multnomah, the National Association for Black Veterans, the Native American Rehabilitation Association and the African American Alliance for Homeownership will provide culturally specific outreach and services to residents.

- In service partnership with the local U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) offices, Columbia Care will develop the **Stewart Avenue Apartments** in Medford. This affordable rental community will include 15 homes to serve veterans at risk of homelessness. On site services will be provided through the VA and peer support specialists.
- The **Veterans Village** in La Grande will provide veterans with ten affordable rental opportunities through individual cottage-style tiny homes. This innovative new community created by the FTX Holding Group is designed to create a single, comprehensive point of access for veterans to connect to supportive services. An existing structure will serve as a community building with partnering local agencies providing services that benefit the physical, emotional and social well-being of the future residents.
- Polk Community Development Corporation is rehabilitating five homes that house recently homeless veterans at their **Leavens House**. Additionally, they will build a new building with eight one-bedroom apartments on the same property. These 13 homes will guarantee the long-term affordability of housing for veterans within the local community while also providing much-needed upgrades the existing five homes.

Oregon Bond Residential Loan. The Oregon Bond Residential Loan program provides 100% financing for federal VA home Loans for first time veteran homebuyers. To date, OHCS has funded 45 loans, totaling \$11.4 million.

HOAP Down Payment Assistance. OHCS' Homeownership Assistance Program (HOAP) we have awarded 13 organizations \$1,552,900 to provide down payment assistance (DPA) up to \$15,000 per veteran who is a first-time homebuyer and who meets the income qualifications of below 100% AMI. In early 2021, OHCS will offer a Request for Applications for the HOAP Restore Health and Safety program to assist veterans with the needed health and safety repairs to their homes.

Outreach to Veterans

OHCS continues to work with Community Action Agencies, the Association of Oregon Counties, the League of Cities, the Oregon Health Authority, Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA), United States Housing and Urban Development (HUD), United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA), and local community non-profits to increase awareness around veteran housing resources.

With the onset of COVID in early 2020—coupled with the affects from the mega fires burning over one million acres in Oregon—OHCS and our partners have had to rethink outreach to veterans seeking assistance. However, as Oregonians have done themselves, OHCS has worked to be flexible, creative and adaptable during these difficult times. OHCS and partners have continued veteran outreach efforts on several fronts.

First, OHCS and partners have focused on safety and wellbeing of veterans experiencing homelessness. We know that there are veterans experiencing homelessness who connect with

street outreach workers and utilized shelter services. OHCS and partners have connected with the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and other state agencies to provide up-to-date shelter guidance and safety information. While these services look different—PPE, social distancing, and increased hygiene—they are still there to meet the needs of veterans.

Second, since the onset of COVID, OHCS has hosted the Statewide Oregon Unhoused Response & Recovery Network for COVID-19 and Wildfires recurring meeting (formerly the Statewide Homeless Populations Taskforce). This taskforce focuses on understanding community needs—including those of veterans—as well as available resources, best practices, and peer sharing. Veteran specific and veteran serving organizations participate in these calls to share and absorb information in the rapidly changing emergency environment. More information about that taskforce can be found [here](#).

Furthermore, our partners have been flexible and creative in their continued engagements with veterans. As an example, the USDVA has conducted HUD-VASH appointments via Zoom, some County and Tribal Veteran Service Officers are helping veterans sign up for benefits via electronic means and many housing intake assessments are being conducted online. Additionally, [ODVA developed a COVID resources specific website](#), as did [OHCS](#), making new and relevant information readily available to veterans and Veteran Service Providers. Work that was already difficult has been further complicated by the concurrent crises but the dedication and commitment to support veterans remains high.

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 has continued to host Veteran Homelessness Provider Convenings (virtually due to COVID-19) 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 four convenings 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.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions the 4th annual Veteran Homelessness Providers Convening originally scheduled for April 2020 at the Deschutes County Fairgrounds had to be postponed. Instead, OHCS and ODVA held a virtual convening on August 19, 2020 to share regional updates, foster virtual statewide collaboration and identify new learning opportunities. During the three-hour convening, participants heard updates from both agencies on current and future funding opportunities, engaged in regional breakout discussions, and reported out as a larger group helping focus future veterans work for the remainder of 2020 and into 2021. Special focus during the discussion was given to COVID challenges and racial injustice. Based on the feedback received from this convening and the after-event survey, OHCS and ODVA launched a

series of virtual workshop sessions over the next several months to continue conversations and connections with the convening participants. Those workshops will focus on the four areas highlighted in the feedback.

1. Data - How to use data to tell an accurate story, capture additional resources, and support Veterans experiencing homelessness. See below for additional information on ongoing work and next steps.
2. Diversity Equity & Inclusion - The value of applying a DEI lens to serving veterans experiencing homelessness.
3. Increasing Collaboration - Partnership is critical to end veteran homelessness.
4. Obtaining More Resources - What else is available out there? Increased knowledge and awareness of the continuum of resources available to serve veterans experiencing homelessness. Including information on OHCS and partner resources.

The first iteration of the Veteran Convening follow-up was titled “2020: What a mess! Know your housing rights” and it was focused the multiple and unique challenges for veterans in housing in 2020. Between COVID-19, the current Civil Rights movement, and the fires in Oregon, it is more important than ever for veterans to know their housing rights. The session included:

- o Fair housing basics and rights
- o Understanding the most common housing barriers veterans face when trying to get into housing
- o Housing and sheltering veterans in a COVID-19 world.
- o Eviction moratoriums (federal, state, and county) along with explanation of the nuances within the various different moratoriums to inform Veteran Service Providers.

This applicable and timely information helped veteran Service Providers understand the rights of veterans to maintain and seek housing. The event was attended by 80 participants representing a wide range of veteran and non-veteran homelessness providers from every corner of the state. The attendance list included members from the Veteran Service Officer community, Support Services for Veterans and Family Members representatives, United States and Oregon Department of Veterans’ Affairs representatives, and OHCS representatives and leadership. We want to thank our partners at the Fair Housing Council of Oregon and the Legal Aid Services of Oregon for putting on a well-received and quality training.

The next session is scheduled for December 16, 2020. It will be led by executive directors from three non-profits doing veterans work in Oregon: Do Good Multnomah, Operation Rebuild Hope, and Polk Community Development Corporation. The session will be focused on addressing barriers with resource management, creative messaging, and strong collaborations. The presenters will use a long-term resiliency focused mindset to show how communities can truly create a continuum of housing options leading through supportive housing and eventually onto self-sufficiency and possible home ownership. This will be the first of two sessions held by this group, with the second one in January of 2021.

Looking ahead we know that 2021 will continue to present challenges but we stand ready and encouraged by the lessons learned from 2020 has brought to this work.