

Implementing Racial Equity in VHA Homeless Programs

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Topics

- Liberated Spaces
- Progress towards Ending Veteran Homelessness
- Implementing Racial Equity in VHA Homeless Programs

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Starting with a Liberated Space

“A liberated space is a space grounded in **community** and **love**. It is a space where we are free (libre) to **be human** along with one another. And since to be human is to err, a Liberated Space is a space where **a mistake, or a transgression will not cost us our freedom**. That being said, in a Liberated Space, we will process whatever intentional and unintentional hurt/pain is caused by our words/actions.

A Liberated Space is a space in which everyone works as a team to **restore that which has been broken**. We all play a part in doing so. In a Liberated Space, we all hold each other accountable for doing so. **We protect each other.**” – *Martin Urbach*

Liberated Space as a Third Way

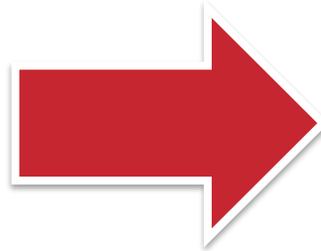


In Liberated Spaces, We...

Are grounded in
community and love.

Look out for each other
and **protect** each other.

Work as a team **to restore**
what has been broken.



Are free to **bring all of**
ourselves.

Are free to **take risks** and
make mistakes.

Are free to be uncomfortable,
to hold tension in life-
giving ways.



Progress towards Ending Veteran Homelessness



Choose **VA**

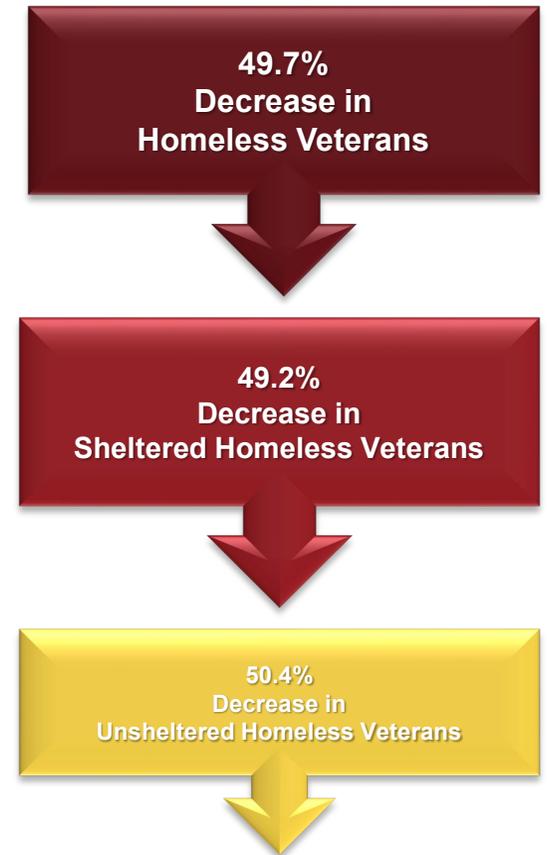
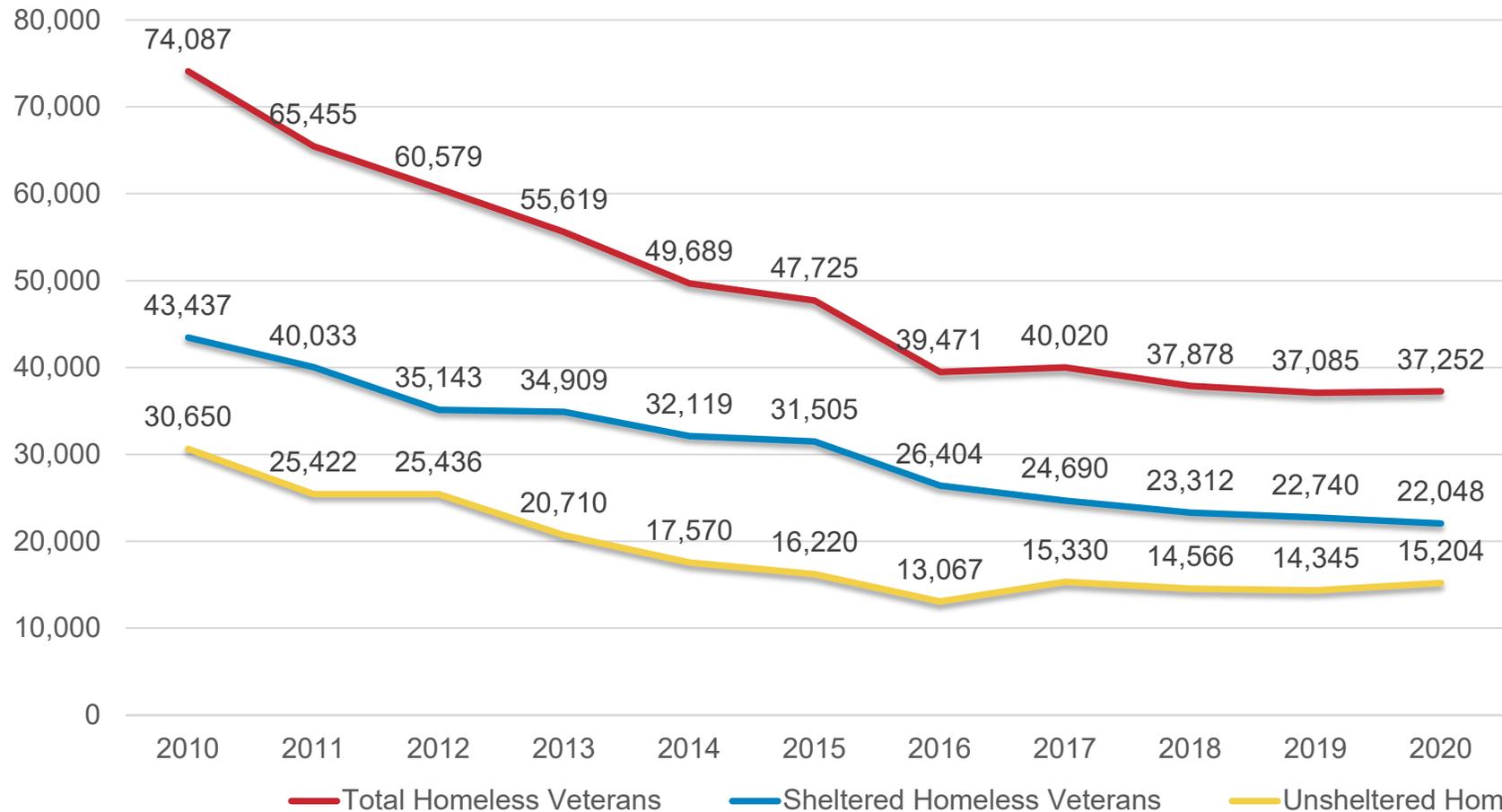
VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Reduction in Veteran Homelessness

Annual Homeless Assessment Report, Point-in-Time, 2010 – 2020



What does Ending Veteran Homelessness Mean?

An end to homelessness does not mean that no one will ever experience a housing crisis again. An end to homelessness means that every community will have a **systematic response** in place that ensures homelessness is **prevented whenever possible** or is otherwise a **rare, brief, and non-recurring** experience.



Overview: Criteria and Benchmarks

VA, Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) have developed specific criteria and benchmarks in order to help guide communities as they take action.

- **Criteria:** Essential elements of a community's response.
- **Benchmarks:** Measurements that a community can use to evaluate its overall effectiveness.

[Criteria and Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Veteran Homelessness – Updated June 2019](#)

Criteria and Benchmarks

Criteria

1. The community has identified all Veterans experiencing homelessness.
2. The community provides shelter immediately to any Veteran experiencing unsheltered homelessness who wants it.
3. The community provides service-intensive transitional housing only in limited instances.
4. The community has capacity to assist Veterans to swiftly move into permanent housing.
5. The community has resources, plans, and system capacity in place should any Veteran become homeless or be at risk of homelessness in the future.

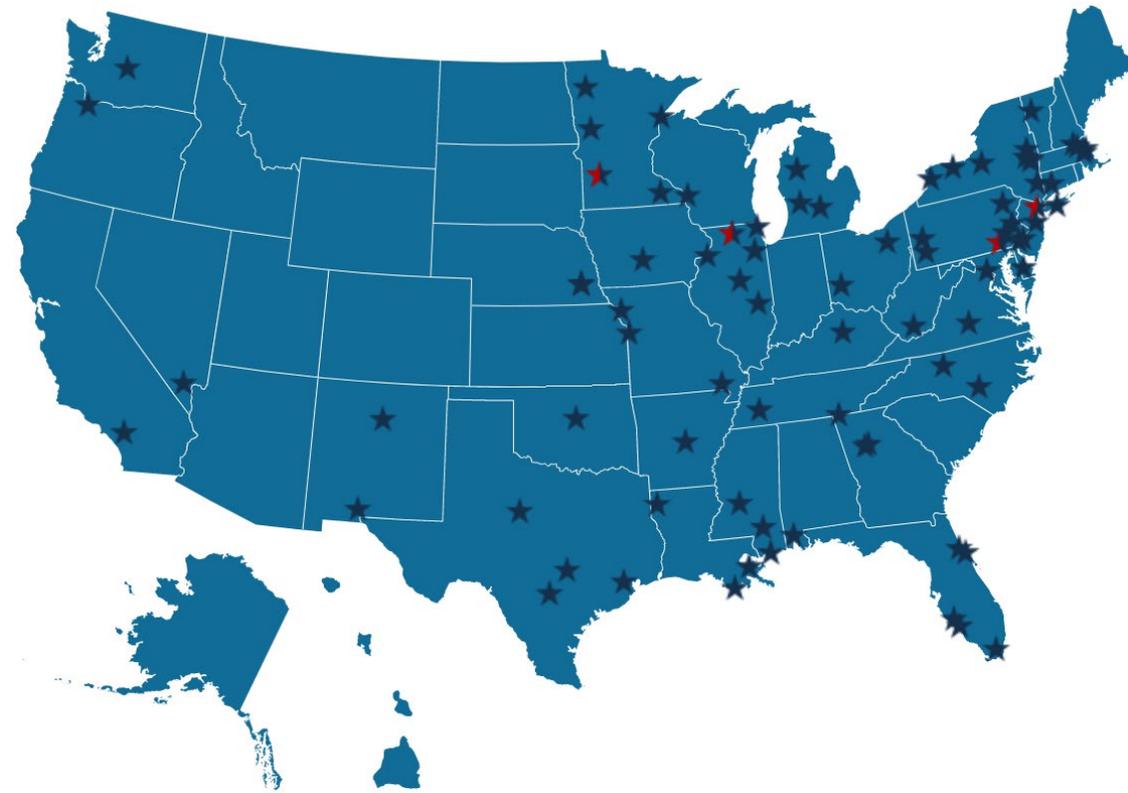
Benchmarks

- A. Chronic and long-term homelessness among Veterans has been ended.
- B. Veterans have quick access to permanent housing.
- C. The community has sufficient permanent housing capacity.
- D. The community is committed to housing first and provides service-intensive transitional housing to veterans experiencing homelessness only in limited instances.



Communities That Have Ended Homelessness

- ★ 82 communities and 3 states have ended Veteran homelessness.
- ★ 4 communities have ended Chronic & Veteran homelessness.



Implementing Racial Equity in VHA Homeless Programs



Racial Equity and Racial Justice Workgroup Overview

- Historically, Black and American Indian / Alaska Native Veterans have been overrepresented in the homeless Veteran population.
- Within this context, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Homeless Programs Office (HPO) established the Racial Equity and Racial Justice Workgroup with efforts addressed through three distinct areas:
 - Policy and program improvements.
 - Direct patient care improvements.
 - Staff support.

Racial Equity and Racial Justice Workgroup Overview

Core Values:

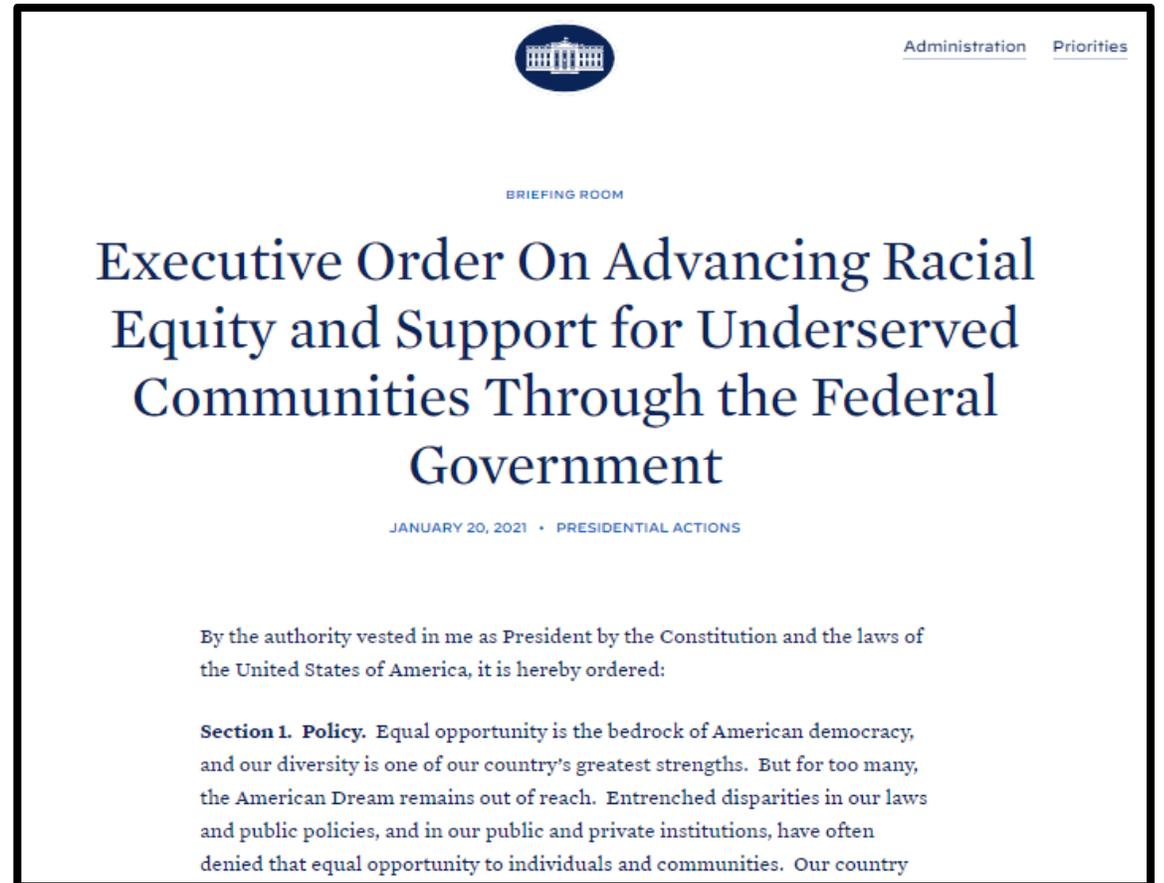
- Ensuring racial equity is key to ending Veteran homelessness.
- For HPO, this means embedding concepts of racial equity and racial justice into its core values.
- Workgroup efforts will work across all HPO program offices to surface opportunities for improvement at the national, Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN), and local levels.

Primary FY 2021 Objectives:

- Conduct an organizational assessment to identify the current status of HPO and use the insights in planning for next steps.
- Develop and launch a racial equity dashboard and quality improvement initiative to identify and address disparities in access and outcomes for Veterans engaged in VA homeless programs.
- Provide educational offerings for staff to ensure competency understanding of racial justice and equity.
- Develop a mentorship network for local homeless program staff.

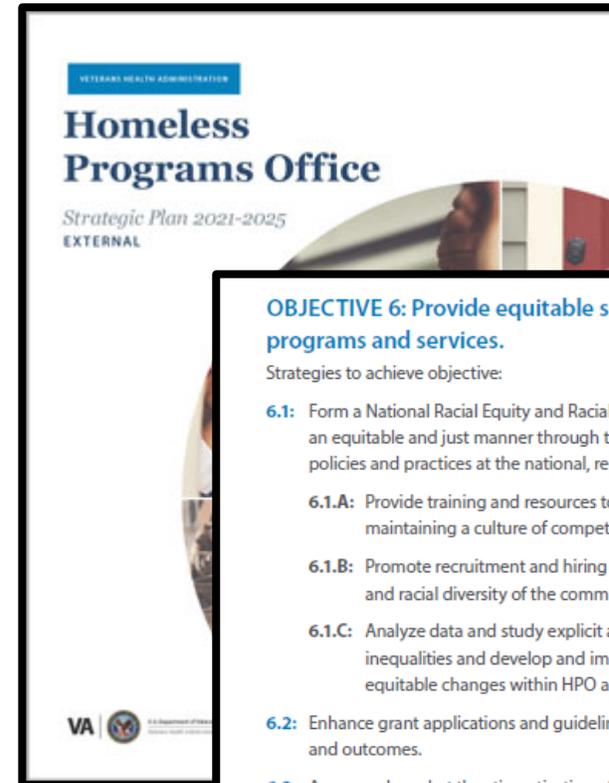
Synergy with Executive Order 13985

- Executive Order 13985, officially titled [Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#), is the first executive order signed by U.S. President Joe Biden on January 20, 2021.
- It advances racial equity and support for underserved communities through the federal government.



Synergy with HPO's Strategic Plan

- The new [2021 – 2025 Homeless Programs Office Strategic Plan](#) outlines its vision for the future and highlights the path to achieve the ambitious goal of ending homelessness among Veterans and their families.
- The plan includes six fundamental objectives and their associated strategies for the future.



OBJECTIVE 6: Provide equitable services and outcomes through all homeless programs and services.

Strategies to achieve objective:

- 6.1:** Form a National Racial Equity and Racial Justice Workgroup that ensures homeless programs operate in an equitable and just manner through the continuous development and implementation of antiracist policies and practices at the national, regional, and local levels.
 - 6.1.A:** Provide training and resources to further systemic knowledge and expertise in building and maintaining a culture of competency around issues of race, gender, and equity.
 - 6.1.B:** Promote recruitment and hiring practices that support a culture of diversity and reflect the culture and racial diversity of the community's population.
 - 6.1.C:** Analyze data and study explicit and implicit factors and patterns that perpetuate disparities and inequalities and develop and implement national strategies for making positive, measurable, and equitable changes within HPO and at the field level.
- 6.2:** Enhance grant applications and guidelines to demonstrate a commitment to racial equity design and outcomes.
- 6.3:** Assess and combat the stigmatization of justice-involved Veterans, including stigmatization based on multi-group identities (including but not limited to race, gender identity, sexual identity, socioeconomic status, and legal history).
- 6.4:** Promote research focused on homeless programs and services inclusive of studying racial disparities in domains that impact the homeless Veteran program population.

Grounding our Work with Data

VHA Homeless Programs
Clinical Operations Business Intelligence



Homeless Programs Racial Equity Dashboard

Population Comparisons

Facility & National

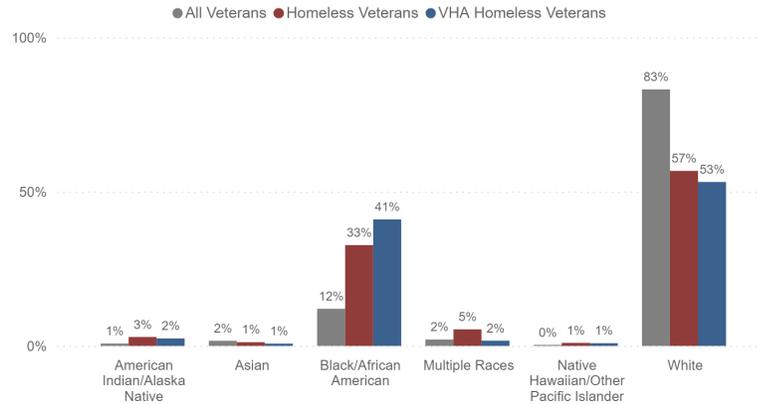
National

All Veterans = Census American Community Survey (ACS) 2019 5-year Veteran estimates. Data represent the overall distribution of Veterans in the general population in the VAMC catchment area.

Homeless Veterans = HUD Point In Time (PIT) 2020 Veteran estimates. Data represent the distribution of homeless Veterans in the VAMC catchment area.

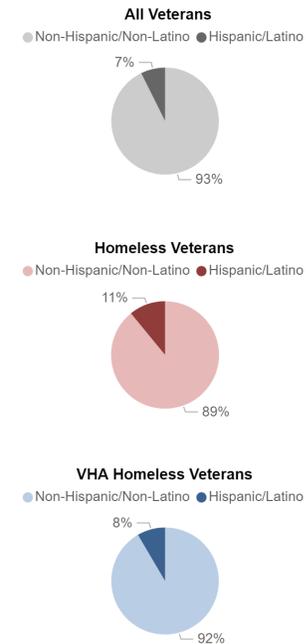
VHA Homeless Veterans = Unique Veterans served in CY2020 in GPD, HCHV CRS/LDSH, HUD-VASH, and SSVF RRH. Data represent the distribution of homeless Veterans served by key VHA homeless programs.

Racial Distribution



Race	All Veterans	Homeless Veterans	VHA Homeless Veterans
American Indian/Alaska Native	1%	3%	2%
Asian	2%	1%	1%
Black/African American	12%	33%	41%
Multiple Races	2%	5%	2%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0%	1%	1%
White	83%	57%	53%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Hispanic/Latino Distribution



Homeless Programs Racial Equity Dashboard

Population Comparisons

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Distribution

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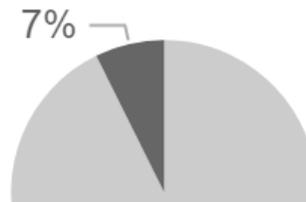
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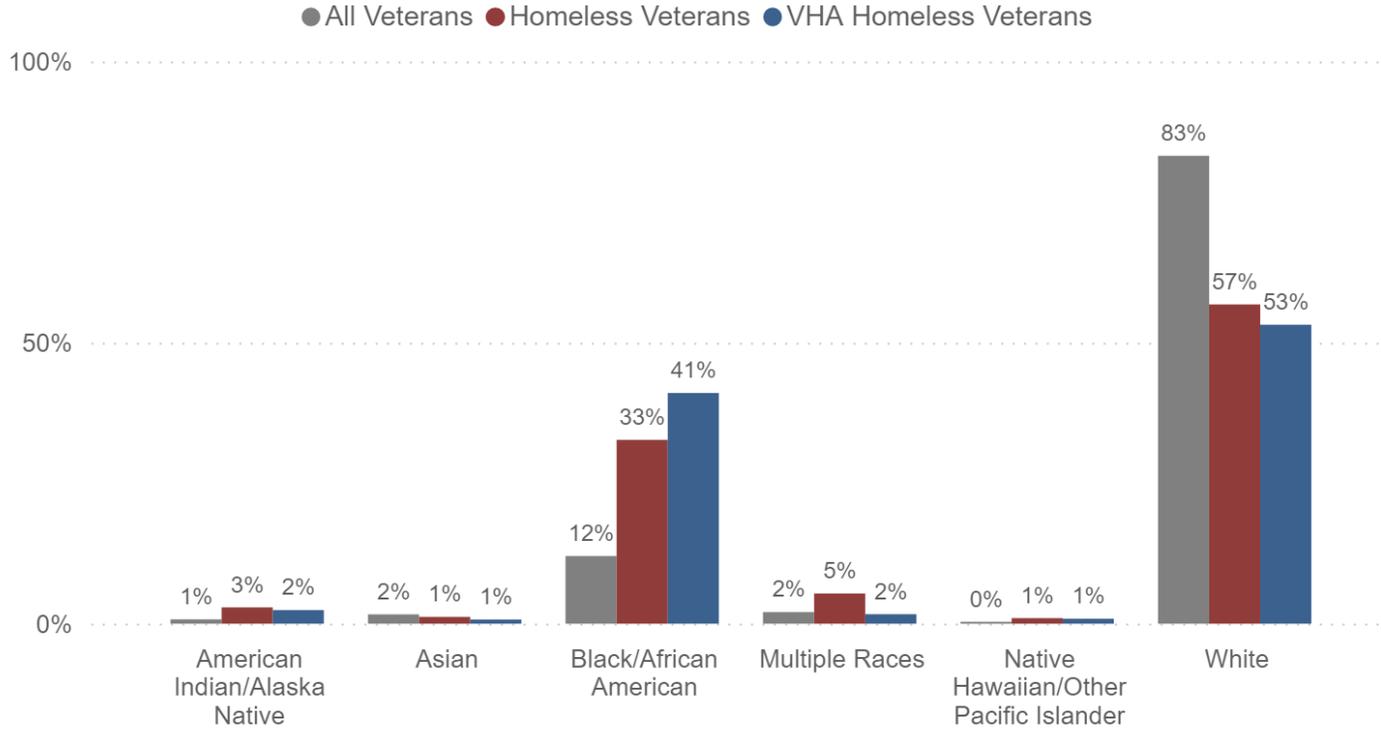
Hispanic/Latino Distribution

All Veterans

● Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino ● Hispanic/Latino

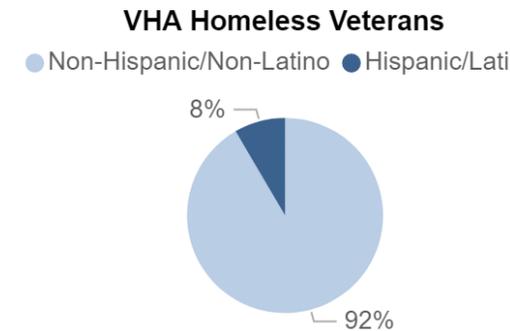
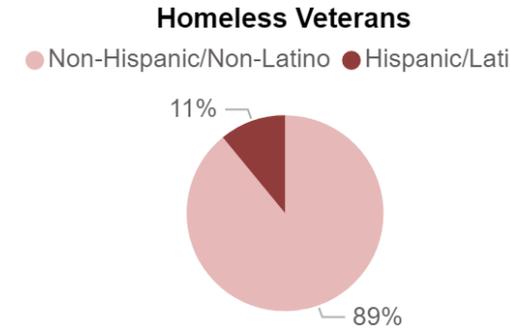
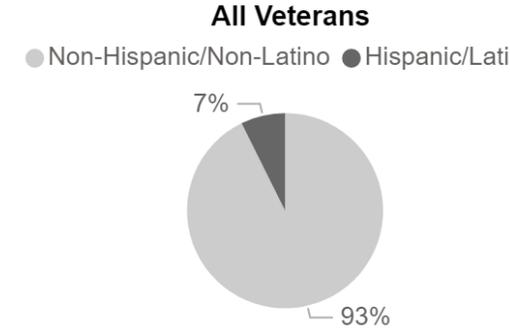


Racial Distribution



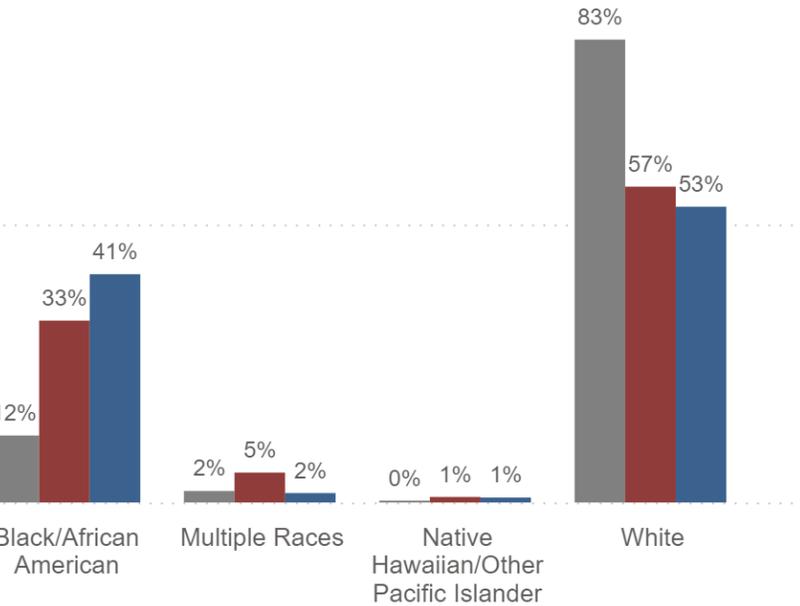
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Hispanic/Latino Distribution



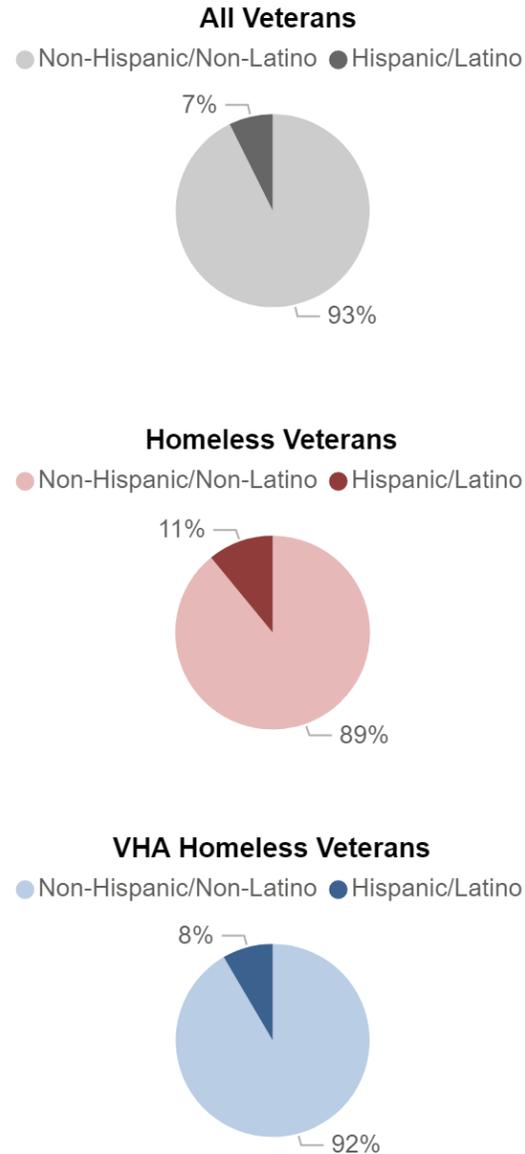
Racial Distribution

Homeless Veterans ● VHA Homeless Veterans



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FY 2022 Organizational Assessment



**3 levels (HPO, Regional,
Local)**



Document Analysis



**Methods for staff to
contribute:**

Orientation
Survey
Listening Sessions
Focus Groups

Virtual Document Analysis

Purpose: to identify opportunities in which racial equity and racial justice can be implemented through official HPO policy.

- Identify instances where racism or disparate outcomes may intentionally or inadvertently emerge due to how policy was written.
- Includes, but not limited to:
 - HPO organizational chart,
 - handbooks and directives,
 - memoranda from the last three fiscal years (FYs),
 - contract solicitations and executed contracts from the last three FYs,
 - grant notices of funding availability from the last three FYs,
 - the current HPO strategic plan and any FY updates, and
 - racial demographics data of Veterans served by VHA homeless programs.



Staff Contribution

Survey

- Distributing to all homeless program-aligned staff
- Gain insight on the perceptions on issues of race and service delivery

Listening Sessions

- 18-20 2-hour sessions
- Optional and participation TBD
- Broken down into cohorts: HPO-wide, NHC, field-level
- Will inform focus group discussions

Focus Groups

- 3-6 2-hour sessions
- Mix of staff from HPO-wide, NHC, field-level.
- Participation through nomination process

FY2022 Racial Improvement Initiative

The Racial Equity Improvement Initiative provides a data-driven, **targeted universalism**, quality improvement framework for local VA homeless programs to ensure equitable access and outcomes for all Veterans served.

1. Define a Universal Goal

2. Measure the Overall Population

3. Measure Population Segments

4. Understand Group-based Factors

5. Implement Targeted Strategies

Why Targeted Universalism?

With targeted universalism, we recognize that **different groups need different supports** to achieve universal goals.

Five Steps for Targeted Universalism

1. Define a Universal Goal

2. Measure the Overall Population

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Performance Measures as Universal Goals

VHA Homeless Programs Performance Measures

Permanent Housing metrics all inform us as to how effective our system is working by measuring the rate of placement of homeless Veterans into permanent housing.

Employment metrics support housing stability, community integration, and independence.

Targeting metrics support identification of homeless Veterans and help ensure the right Veterans are served by the right programs.

Process metrics inform us of how well our programs are operating to end homelessness by measuring how long it takes to provide services.

Negative Exit metrics inform us of how well our programs are operating to prevent homelessness by measuring the rate of negative clinical outcomes from our programs.

Five Steps for Targeted Universalism

1. Define a Universal Goal ✓

2. Measure the Overall Population ✓

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Measuring Population Segments with the VA Homeless Programs Racial Equity Dashboard

- The VHA Homeless Programs Racial Equity Dashboard assists with the measuring population segments by providing disaggregated race and ethnicity information on:
 - Total populations.
 - Access to services.
 - Exit outcomes.
 - Lengths of time in programs or in housing processes.
- These reports display information at the national, VISN, and local levels.

Five Steps for Targeted Universalism

1. Define a Universal Goal ✓

2. Measure the Overall Population ✓

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Understanding Group-based Factors

- Understanding group-based factors involves **deep investigation** of the problem and the circumstances that confront each group or impede achievement of the universal goal.
- While the search for impediments is a critical part of this examination of structures, it should not be restricted to the identification of barriers.
- Assessments should be driven by a **proactive interest in monitoring and evaluating** achievement of the universal goal.

Developing Meaningful Partnerships to Help Our Understanding

- Diverse representation throughout this process – affected groups, community organizing experts, policy groups, and decisionmakers – ensures that the assessment is deeply informed by a broad base of knowledge.
- Think about who should be at the table:
 - Co-workers at the VAMC?
 - Homeless program lead / supervisor / section chief?
 - Public Housing Authorities?
 - Continuum of Care agencies?
 - HMIS Staff?
 - Veterans with lived homelessness experience?
- Compensate Veterans with lived experience homelessness fairly for their expertise.

Connect with System and Community Partners

- Collaboration with system and community partners is effective in understanding group-based factors.
- Expand the definition of community and partners to ensure representation from persons with lived expertise, BIPOC grassroots organizations, LGBTQ+ organizations, Civil Rights activists, etc.
 - Gain valuable insights and creative solutions: Persons with lived expertise of homelessness.
 - Understand the experience the data is demonstrating.

“Those closest to the problem are closest to the solution” – Glenn E. Martin

Five Steps for Targeted Universalism

1. Define a Universal Goal ✓

2. Measure the Overall Population ✓

3. Measure Population Segments ✓

4. Understand Group-based Factors ✓

5. Implement Targeted Strategies

Implement Solution Oriented Changes

- Critical changes may need to happen at the system level and/or at the organizational level.
- Monitor data for impacts of changes:
 - Positive and negative.
 - Note unintended consequences.
- Update plans and community stakeholders when policy and procedure changes are made based on feedback.
- Failure (and transparency) are critical parts of continuous improvement.

Continually Monitor and Evaluate Progress

- Equity analysis isn't a one-time event.
- Incorporate equity goals into project design.
- Routinely review your programs' information on the Racial Equity Dashboard.
- Regularly engage community to discuss results.
- If something isn't working, don't be afraid to pivot and try again!



Five Steps for Targeted Universalism

1. Define a Universal Goal ✓

2. Measure the Overall Population ✓

3. Measure Population Segments ✓

4. Understand Group-based Factors ✓

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Strong and
Innovative
Practices
Coming
Soon!

Q&A



Contact Info

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Choose **VA**

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs