



Update Regarding U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program (HUD-VASH)

Please note: CSH is offering the information in this Summary based on our current best understanding and interpretation of the information provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This Summary is not meant to represent official advice under HUD authority.

On May 8, 2008 the Department of Housing and Urban Development and representatives from the Department of Veterans' Affairs conducted a webcast to present information about implementation of the HUD-VASH program. An archive of the webcast will be posted at <http://www.hud.gov/webcasts/archives/>. HUD also announced that it would be creating a webpage off of its Housing Choice Voucher page (located within Public and Indian Housing) that will post information, including a Frequently Asked Questions list. The link will be available at <http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/hcv/index.cfm>

In addition, on May 6, 2008 HUD published its official guidance for HUD-VASH implementation in the Federal Register, which is available at <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2008/pdf/08-1220.pdf>.

BACKGROUND

Between 1992 and 1994 HUD and VA released 1,700 HUD-VASH vouchers, which provided housing assistance modeled after the standard Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program and case management services through local VA Medical Centers (VAMC). During this time 35 Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) participated. HUD estimates that 1,000 individuals remain housed based on these efforts.

The Fiscal Year 2008 Consolidated Appropriations Act allocated \$75 million for HUD-VASH vouchers that will serve an estimated 10,000 veterans. HUD and VA have allocated these vouchers based on several factors, including the number of homeless veterans needing services and the VA case management resources available. A total of 132 local VA Medical Centers will be working in this effort and this will represent at least one site in each of the 50 states. HUD identified eligible PHAs in areas with participating VAMCs and reached out to these sites to offer invitations to participate. Therefore there will not be a NOFA process.

VETERANS AFFAIRS PROCESS

The VA is developing a handbook that will be disseminated via the local VAMCs and will be available for access on the VA website. The information included will detail roles and responsibilities including but not limited to:

- Staffing guidelines
- Training requirements for staff
- Eligibility for participation
- Process of eligibility screening

To administer this program, conduct screenings, provide housing assistance and provide supportive services, the VA is hiring 290 VASH case managers nationwide. These staff are expected to be hired by June 1, 2008.

Items of note:

- Eligible participants, including individuals or families, are homeless veterans.
- Participants can be homeless veterans who have been living on the streets or in emergency shelter, but they also can be referred from other VA homeless service programs like the VA's Per Diem (transitional housing) program.
- The VA is requesting their VAMCs reach out to local PHAs in the coming weeks to discuss some of the specific implementation and logistical details.
- All initial screening for eligibility and participation will be completed by VAMC staff and then those accepted will be referred to PHAs for voucher assistance.
- PHAs may not maintain waiting lists or apply local preferences for these vouchers.
- PHAs will not have the authority to screen potentially eligible participants or deny assistance under most program rules, with one exception. PHAs will be required to deny assistance if a household member is subject to a lifetime registration requirement as a sex offender.
- The VAMC will be responsible for providing appropriate treatment and supportive services to program participants. VA case managers will provide assistance in locating housing, providing ongoing case management and help to access health services and other supportive services as needed.
- Each local VAMC will utilize a ratio of one full-time HUD-VASH case manager for every 35 voucher recipients.

CHANGES FROM STANDARD SECTION 8 HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM AND FROM PREVIOUS HUD-VASH ALLOCATIONS

During the webcast, HUD noted that implementation of HUD-VASH under this year's allocation will differ from previous years because Congress gave HUD the authority to waive many program rules that would otherwise apply to Section 8 vouchers or the HUD-VASH program, for purposes of administering these new vouchers. (Where PHAs are still administering HUD-VASH vouchers allocated in the past, the original rules will continue to apply to those vouchers.)

The majority of the changes HUD announced are to make the program more flexible in the front-end, particularly for eligibility criteria.

Notable changes in this program from the standard Section 8 / Housing Choice Voucher program include but are not limited to:

1. PHAs must allow a minimum of 120 days for the initial housing search (instead of the standard 60 day timeframe) with additional potential extension based on PHA policies.
2. Families can sign leases for less than 12 months if they request it.
3. HUD-VASH participants must live in areas accessible to case management services as determined by the partnering VAMC. Portability is allowed on a case-by-case basis as long as the VAMC can still provide supportive services.
4. Participation in case management services is mandatory in order to maintain eligibility for housing voucher assistance. However, if VAMC determines that services are no longer needed the VAMC case manager can put this in writing and participant can continue to receive voucher assistance without services.

5. Project basing vouchers IS allowable on a case by case basis. The local VAMC must be supportive of this in order for HUD to approve it. As the implementation of this year's vouchers gets underway, HUD and VA are committed to leasing up the vouchers in order to serve homeless veterans quickly. As a result there may be some hesitancy around project-basing if projects are still in development and not ready for occupancy soon. It is possible that these rules will be relaxed when additional vouchers become available in future years. Another 10,000 vouchers were requested in the FY 09 Budget and Congress is expected to approve this funding request.
6. This program is NOT monitored by SEMAP guidelines like standard Section 8 therefore the utilization guidelines and income targeting used in standard Section 8 will not be enforced. Homeless veterans served by this program may be at a variety of income levels. However, PHAs are being encouraged to target "extremely low income" as they can count these households in reporting about income targeting.
7. HUD has waived the requirement that only homeless veterans with chronic mental illness or chronic substance use disorders are eligible for VASH vouchers, and that treatment for these disorders is a condition of receiving assistance. All homeless veterans are eligible for this program.