
Montgomery County

Zero: 2016 Plan

Presented by

Montgomery County Continuum of Care

June, 2015

Montgomery County Zero: 2016

Fiscal 2016 Plan - June, 2015

I. Background

Zero: 2016 is a national effort of 71 communities across the country who have committed to ending Veteran homelessness by December, 2015 and chronic homelessness by December, 2016. Led by Community Solutions, Zero: 2016 supports participating communities in optimizing local resources, tracking progress against monthly housing goals, and accelerating the spread of proven strategies. Zero: 2016 provides hands-on coaching, implementation of transparent data and performance management, and a shared learning environment to participating communities.

Montgomery County's Zero: 2016 Initiative, is a rigorous follow-on to its successful 100,000 Homes Campaign and will build upon these past efforts. Montgomery County will continue to use a Housing First model as the basis for its plan. Housing First is an approach that centers on providing homeless people with housing quickly and then providing support services as needed to help maintain housing stability. What differentiates a Housing First approach from traditional placement into emergency shelter or transitional housing is that it is not based on "housing readiness" but is "housing-based," with an immediate and primary focus on helping individuals and families quickly access and sustain permanent housing.

Montgomery County's Zero: 2016 Plan for Fiscal Year 2016 was developed with a primary focus on the rapid exit of Veterans from homelessness to permanent, sustainable housing. The following plan is the result of collaborative discussions between Department Health and Human Services (DHHS) and key stakeholders including family and single adult shelter providers, Veterans groups, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) providers and others. This group reviewed the current homeless Continuum of Care to determine what resources – federal, state and local – as well as what strategies were needed to address Veterans homelessness. These strategies require the redeployment of existing resources and the addition of new resources to reduce the length of stay in homelessness for Veterans.

II. Getting to Zero for Veterans: Take Down Number

Montgomery County has committed to ending homelessness in Montgomery County by setting a goal to move 56 Veterans who are Montgomery County residents experiencing homelessness into permanent housing by December 31, 2015. This does not mean that there will never be a veteran experiencing homelessness but, rather, that the community has reached sustainable functional zero. Functional zero means that, at any point in time, the number of Veteran experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness will be no greater than the current monthly housing placement rate for the Veteran population.

Functional Zero = Homeless Veteran \leq Veteran Monthly Housing Placement Average

This goal or “take down number” is based on the current number of homeless Veterans who have been identified in the County’s Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), through the 2015 annual Point-in-Time Survey, and by Department of Veterans Affairs staff working at the Veterans One-Stop Center located in the Montgomery County Crisis Center. In addition to the number of homeless Veterans in the County who have previously been identified through these sources, a projection of the number of Veterans who will become homeless during the course of 2015 has been developed using both national trends as well as past experience specific to Montgomery County.

To get to the targeted total of 56 homeless Veterans from Montgomery County housed by December 31, 2015, projections of the types of housing necessary have been developed by Community Solutions and the Department of Veterans Affairs using national data.

National Guidelines for Projecting Housing Placements for Homeless Veterans				
Chronically Homeless – 33%		Episodic and Short Term Homeless – 67%		
Need Permanent Supportive Housing		Do Not Need Permanent Supportive Housing		
VA eligible - 85%	not VA eligible - 15%	Rapid Rehousing, VA Eligible – 37.5%	Rapid Rehousing and Other Housing, Not VA Eligible– 37.5 %	Self-Resolving – 25%
Montgomery County Targets Based on Available Data				
7 – VASH (VA)	12 – VPH	14 – SSVF (VA)	14 - VRRH	9 - No intervention necessary

III. Who is a Veteran?

As approved by the Montgomery County CoC, for this campaign, a Veteran is any individual experiencing homelessness who has served on active duty in the United States Military, regardless of discharge status. The active duty requirement is not time restricted, which means that it applies to any length of service beyond training/boot camp. This definition includes persons who are not eligible for some homelessness programs and services provided through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Using this definition, a master list of all persons identified as Veterans and are currently homeless in Montgomery County has been developed. This list was created

using data from the CoC Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), the January 2015 Point-in-Time (PIT) survey, input from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and their SSVF contractors, and from other providers in our community who work with veterans experiencing homelessness.

The list is updated regularly – in most cases, daily in order to ensure it has the most up-to-date information on veterans in our community. The Master List is not a waiting list; veterans on this list may already be accessing programs, waiting for a housing unit, or may self-resolve their homelessness. This list is meant to get the key partners involved in ending veteran homelessness in our community.

IV. Prioritization of Existing Housing Resources for Homeless Veterans

The Montgomery County CoC has committed to prioritizing housing resources to meet the needs of homeless veterans. When eligible, veterans are first connected to VA funded programs including the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program (VASH) and Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) programs. However, for those persons who meet the CoC definition for Veteran but who are not eligible for VA services other housing resources will be utilized.

The Montgomery County CoC has developed a coordinated entry system and written standards for access to housing resources to assure transparent and uniform decision-making when assessing need and referring persons to housing. The Montgomery County CoC currently uses two different assessment tools to measure vulnerability and need for a housing intervention; one tool for individuals, and another tool for families.

The Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization and Decision Assessment Tool (VI-SPDAT) is used to assess individuals who are in need of housing intervention(s) and the locally-developed Housing Options Targeting Tool is used to assess families. Coordinated entry access points use the tools in order to initially prioritize the needs of each presenting household. The tools are short in nature and are used to collect the minimum amount of information necessary to initially assess individuals or families who enter the coordinated entry system and identify housing resources needed. Information about housing needs is compiled and prioritization for housing is tracked by the Housing Prioritization Committee.

Vacancies in housing programs are reported to the County Coordinator within five business days of unit/bed availability. The County Coordinator tracks vacancies and assures that appropriate referrals are made for vacancies based on prioritization as determined by the Housing Priority Committee. Veterans identified as needing a supportive housing option are referred to the Housing Priority Committee for prioritization and referral.

Montgomery County CoC has established priority populations for permanent housing options for individuals and families. The CoC will prioritize Veterans over non-veterans when referring individuals and families to permanent housing options.

Essentially, this means that if two households present for assistance and both fall under the same order of priority (e.g. both chronically homeless and fall under Priority 1), but one is a veteran household and the other is not, the veteran household will be prioritized first. In general, the CoC will prioritize veteran households that are not eligible for VA housing or services.

IV. New Housing Resources

As part of Montgomery County's FY 2016 Budget, an appropriation in the amount of \$500,000 was approved to provide housing and supportive services to homeless Veterans in the County. This additional program funding will be made available as early as July 1, 2015.

The objective of this additional funding is to provide a range of permanent housing and supportive services opportunities to house Veterans who have been identified through the County's homeless services system. The expectation is that this new funding in combination with existing resources will be enable Montgomery County to meet its goal of ending homelessness for Veterans.

Two new programs will be developed using this additional funding:

1. Veterans Permanent Housing with Supports Program (VPH) targeted to Veterans, who may or may not have documented disabilities, but have significant behavioral health, medical, or other significant barriers that will require ongoing rental assistance and social services support. The intent of this new program is to provide permanent housing assistance to Veterans who may need a wide range of social service engagement in order to maintain housing stability. This program should be flexible enough to be able to respond to both a person who needs very limited service support as well as a person who needs ongoing and regular case management interaction. The VPH will provide housing and supportive services for 15 Veterans. The anticipated funding for the program should cover all costs, including rental subsidies at Fair Market Rent, social services support, and any administrative costs of the provider.
2. Veterans Rapid Re-Housing Program (VRRH) targeted to Veterans who need assistance in obtaining housing, short or medium term assistance with rental payments, and some time-limited social services support. This program should be flexible enough to be able to respond to both a person who needs minimal service support as well as a person who needs more intensive case management interaction to gain self-sufficiency. The VRRH will provide time-limited rental assistance and some social service support for 15 Veterans. The period of engagement between the clients and the VRRH will be case specific, based on individual need and circumstances. It is expected that some clients will need very short term assistance while others may require up to 12 months. The anticipated funding for the program should cover all costs, including deposits, time limited

rental subsidies at Fair Market Rent, housing navigation and social services support, and any administrative costs of the provider.

The County plans to identify and contract with a non-government agency (or agencies) to provide all services and programming required for the implementation of these programs.

Programs must follow the Housing First model, which means that:

- Housing for all clients served is provided in a permanent setting
- Participants must be able to abide by a standard lease agreement
- Services are voluntary and will be designed to promote housing stability and well-being
- The type of services provided are to be based on individual need
- Housing is not contingent on compliance with services

These programs are intended to supplement existing mainstream benefit programs, not to replace the existing resources. Program providers must incorporate services focused on improving client access to mainstream benefit programs, such as Social Security disability benefits and Veteran benefits. In addition

These new programs are intended to supplement existing Federal resources that are already being committed to Veterans homelessness in the County. These Federal resources include:

1. the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program (VASH), which is a Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) which provides long-term rental assistance vouchers and social services specifically targeted to homeless veterans, and
2. the Supportive Service for Veteran Families Program (SSVF) which provides time-limited financial and supportive services to individuals and families who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness to enable them to quickly regain stability in permanent housing after experiencing a housing crisis and/or homelessness.

Eligibility and Process for Referral

Veterans will be referred to these programs through the Montgomery County coordinated entry system. Montgomery County's Department of Health and Human Services ("HHS"), working through the Veterans Work Group of the Housing Prioritization Committee, will be responsible for maintaining a list of potential clients for the VPH and VRRH programs. For all persons on the list, the Veterans Work Group is expected to prioritize the use of Federal resources, including VASH vouchers and SSVF prevention funds and rental assistance, before any referral to the VPH, or VRRH are considered.

If a person on the list cannot access VASH or SSVF, whether because of eligibility criteria or lack of available funding, that person can then be considered for referral to VPH or VRRH as vacancies occur. Once referred, the provider(s) for the VPH,

or VRRH programs will be required to accept clients in accordance with the CoC's written standards.

V. Gaps

Montgomery County has many resources in place to prevent and address homelessness—yet gaps remain in some areas. The community has been working hard to coordinate and collaborate to fill gaps in the service delivery system for the homeless population. The primary gaps in providing a more sustainable services network for persons who are homeless include:

1. Lack of affordable and diversified housing stock in general, and particularly for seniors, especially those who may need some level of assisted living
2. Barriers for persons with limited or no income to access the affordable and supportive housing which is currently available.
3. Lack of ability to quickly access affordable housing for populations such as domestic violence victims
4. Resources for programs providing models to assist in ending intergenerational poverty.
5. Programming focused on long-term economic security.

VI. Sustainability

The following strategies will be used to sustain the efforts of ending Veteran homelessness:

1. Continuing to serve Veterans with the Housing First approach and provide individualized pathways to permanent housing.
2. Reducing the unsheltered status and minimize the time spent being homeless.
3. Improving access to mainstream benefit programs, such as Social Security disability benefits and Veteran benefits. By providing outreach to Veterans about SSA benefits and assisting eligible adults through the SSA application process using the SOAR model, we can increase income security and housing stability and help end Veteran homelessness.
4. Providing prevention assistance includes but is not limited to rental and utility assistance; down payment assistance; legal assistance; employment assistance; vocation assistance; mental health and substance abuse assistance; and housing counseling.

VII. Conclusion

The Montgomery County Continuum of Care (CoC) is delighted to join the Zero: 2016 National Campaign. The CoC's goal is to end homelessness for all Veterans, not just those with honorable discharges. The strategy to achieve this vision is of making homelessness a rare, brief, and nonrecurring event for Veterans in Montgomery County.