

Why GAO Did This Study

In August 2016, HUD and VA announced that the number of homeless veterans in the United States had been cut nearly in half since 2010 to less than 40,000. Part of this effort is the EUL program, which uses unneeded federal property (land or buildings) for housing for homeless veterans.

GAO was asked to review VA's EUL program and other efforts to end veteran homelessness. This report examines: (1) how VA uses EULs to provide supportive-housing and services, (2) VA's plans to develop additional supportive-housing through EULs and how past plans have been implemented, and (3) how HUD-VASH, GPD, and SSVF have helped support the goal of ending veterans' homelessness. GAO analyzed agency documents, VA data on enhanced-use leases, and VA data on the HUD-VASH, GPD, and SSVF programs. GAO visited 13 active supportive-housing EUL sites, selected to provide a range of locations and housing types. GAO interviewed VA and HUD officials, lessee representatives, service providers, and veteran organizations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that VA (1) document its decision-making process in selecting projects as required by VA's policy and (2) update its policy to address the current authority and specify how to identify properties for supportive-housing EULs to meet the needs of homeless veterans. VA concurred with both recommendations but disagreed with some of GAO's findings. GAO believes its findings are valid based on the evidence presented.

View [GAO-17-101](#). For more information, contact David J. Wise, (202) 512-2834 or wised@gao.gov or Alicia Puente Cackley, (202) 512-8678 or cackleya@gao.gov

HOMELESS VETERANS

Management Improvements Could Help VA Better Identify Supportive-Housing Projects

What GAO Found

As of September 2016, for veterans who were homeless or at risk of homelessness, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) had developed 35 enhanced-use leases (EUL) for supportive-housing with low cost rental housing and coordinated access to medical, rehabilitative, mental healthcare, and other services. Each supportive-housing EUL is located on a VA medical center campus. Some lessee representatives told GAO that having access to federal property at little or no cost helped them to rehabilitate or build facilities to create supportive-housing. Furthermore, they noted that the close proximity to VA healthcare services allowed them to invest in other needed services for homeless veterans, such as counseling, job training, and quality-of-life amenities.

VA has plans to develop additional supportive-housing EULs, 6 of which are under construction and 16 in development. However, VA needs to improve its documentation and update its policies to develop additional EULs. VA officials did not provide clear and complete documentation for the selection of supportive-housing EUL projects, as required by VA policy, and *Standards for Internal Controls in the Federal Government*. Completely documenting this decision-making process for selecting properties could provide institutional knowledge to inform future decisions. Also, *Standards for Internal Controls in the Federal Government* states that management should periodically review policies and procedures for continued relevance and effectiveness of a federal program, and that management considers the impact of deficiencies identified in achieving documentation requirements. VA's existing policy on EUL projects is outdated. For example, it refers to an EUL authority that previously allowed the development of a full range of EUL projects. However, this authority is no longer in effect. VA is updating its EUL policy; however, the updated draft policy still does not discuss VA's limited authority to provide housing for homeless veterans. Further, the updated draft policy does not specifically provide direction on how to determine whether a proposed supportive-housing EUL meets the needs of homeless veterans. Without documented policies and procedures that address these needs, VA may not be well positioned to identify viable supportive-housing EUL projects and help ensure that those projects are successfully developed.

Three programs—Housing and Urban Development and VA Supportive-Housing (HUD-VASH), VA's Grant and Per Diem (GPD), and Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF)—were used in conjunction with supportive-housing EULs to help support the goal of ending veteran homelessness. From fiscal years 2012 to 2016, the number of chronically homeless and vulnerable veterans housed through the HUD-VASH program increased from about 37,000 to 72,500. Community officials GAO interviewed stated that the HUD-VASH program has been instrumental in reducing chronic veteran homelessness. From fiscal years 2012 to 2016, veterans served by the transitional housing-focused GPD program remained relatively steady. Veterans and their family members participating in the SSVF program increased from about 33,000 in fiscal year 2012 to 149,000 in fiscal year 2016. According to the VA, rental assistance made up the majority of the temporary financial assistance provided by the SSVF program.