



RESEARCH BRIEF

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Impact and Performance of the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program: Results from the FY 2013 Program Year

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SSVF OVERVIEW

The Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program represents a crucial component of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) plan to prevent and end homelessness among Veterans. Operationalized in Federal Fiscal Year (FY) 2012, SSVF is the first and only VA program that provides services to Veterans and their families. SSVF is a community-based, competitive grant program that rapidly re-houses homeless Veteran families and prevents homelessness for those at imminent risk due to a housing crisis. The program focuses on achieving housing stability through a short-term, customized intervention using a time limited case management approach. Services include financial assistance to offset move-in costs or remediate rental arrears; help in locating housing; landlord mediation services; financial management and credit counseling; support for child care and transportation; and assistance with accessing healthcare and other supportive services.

SSVF employs a Housing First model, which prioritizes access to permanent rental housing as quickly as possible, without preconditions. SSVF providers concentrate on helping Veterans increase their income through employment and benefits while addressing issues that can interfere with housing stability.

This brief summarizes the impact and performance of the SSVF program during its second year of operation in FY 2013, drawing comparisons, where relevant, with the information presented for FY 2012 in a previous report¹. Using data collected by SSVF grantees and from other VA sources this brief provides an overview of the SSVF program's funding and households served, characteristics of SSVF participants, and program outcomes. The brief concludes by taking stock of the important achievements of the SSVF program during its first two years. It also discusses opportunities for program refinement to maximize its effectiveness in preventing and ending homelessness among Veterans.

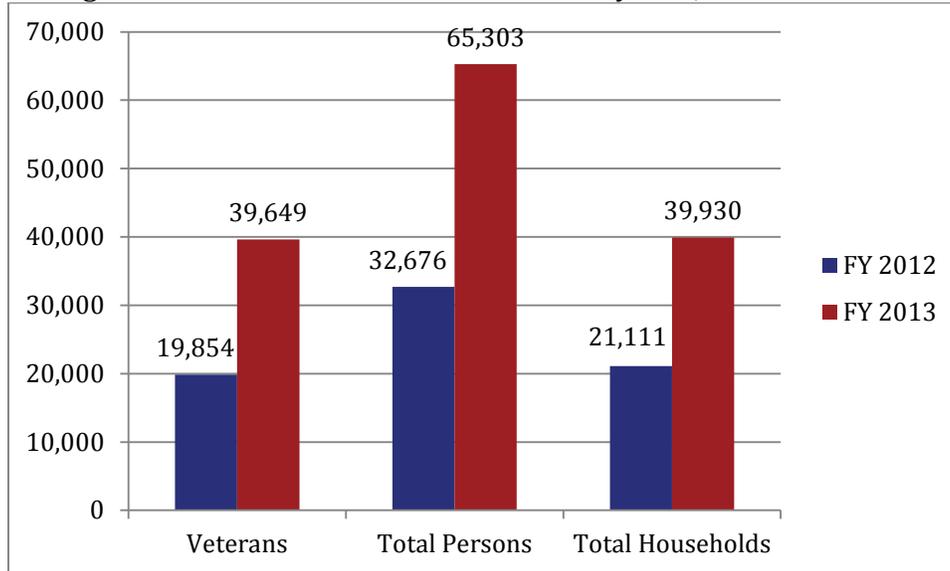
SSVF FUNDING AND PERSONS SERVED

SSVF has had a dramatic impact in its first two years of operation. As shown in Figure 1, almost 100,000 Veterans and their family members (97,979 unique people in total) received direct

¹ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2013). Effectiveness of Program: FY 2012 Report. Available at: www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/SSVF/Effectiveness_of_SSVF_Program_Report_FY2012.pdf

assistance from SSVF during FY 2012 and FY 2013. That figure includes 59,503 Veterans. SSVF has quickly scaled up to become a crucial form of assistance that is available for individual Veterans and Veteran families throughout the entire country. The impact of the program will continue to grow in the coming years due to a tripling of funding for SSVF from FY 2013 to FY 2014, with an additional increase proposed for FY 2015. Thanks to this infusion of resources, the program will be able to prevent and end homelessness among an even greater number of Veterans and their families.

Figure 1-Veterans and Total Persons Served by SSVF, FY 2012-FY 2013



Efficient Use of Resources

SSVF grantees made more efficient use of program resources in the program’s second year of operation as first year grantees, now fully established, did not have to use the first few months of the grant cycle to ramp up operations. In FY 2012, \$60 million was allocated to 85 grantees in 40 states and the District of Columbia. In FY 2013, total funding for SSVF increased by 68% to \$100 million dollars, which was awarded to 151 grantees in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Importantly, the growth in the number of persons served by SSVF outstripped the increase in funding; the number of Veterans served increased by 100%, from 19,854 to 39,649 between FY 2012 and FY 2013. The overall number of persons served also doubled, increasing from 32,676 to 65,303 between year one and year two of the SSVF program. The faster growth in the number of persons served relative to growth in funding was largely driven by lower service costs and greater efficiencies achieved by renewal grantees in FY 2013. Indeed, the average cost per household served by SSVF dropped from \$2,810 to \$2,410—a decrease of 12%—between the first and second year of the program’s operation.

Targeting to Maximize Impact

In its first two years of existence, resources from the SSVF program were targeted to maximize impact on reducing homelessness. Of the 59,503 Veterans served by SSVF during that period, 37,209 (62%) were literally homeless at program entry and received rapid re-housing assistance; the remaining 22,937 (38%) Veterans were imminently at-risk of literal homelessness when they entered the program and received homelessness prevention assistance. Serving relatively more households who are currently homeless helps to ensure that resources are reaching Veterans with the most acute housing problems who can most benefit from assistance.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SSVF PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

Reaching Target Populations

The SSVF program has been successful in reaching its priority target populations while also continuing to serve large numbers of other groups of Veterans in need. It promotes housing stability and community reintegration for individuals and families from all eras of service. This is clearly illustrated in Figure 2, which shows the age distribution of Veterans served by SSVF in FY 2013.

In FY 2013, four priority target populations for SSVF grantees were: 1) Veteran households earning less than 30% of Area Median Income (AMI); 2) Veterans with at least one dependent family member; 3) Households with one or more female Veterans; and 4) Returning Veterans from Afghanistan and/or Iraq. SSVF program data indicate that grantees succeeded in identifying and assisting these groups of Veterans. In FY 2013, 76% of households served had incomes less than 30% of AMI, and a total of 29,500 persons, or 45% of all those served by SSVF in FY 2013, were part of a household with children. These figures demonstrate that the program met its goals in primarily serving very low-income Veteran families and connecting those families with supportive services to meet their needs.

SSVF also served substantial numbers of female Veterans and Veterans who were deployed as part of Operations Enduring Freedom (OEF), Iraqi Freedom (OIF) or New Dawn (OND). Figure 3 compares the relative numbers of female Veterans and OEF/OIF/OND Veterans served by SSVF in FY 2013 against the comparable numbers of these groups served by other VA homeless programs and in the overall Veteran population. Roughly fifteen percent of Veterans served by SSVF in FY 2013 were female. This was the highest proportion of women served of any VA homeless initiative and was greater than the national rate of female Veterans in the United States. Similarly, 6,610 Veterans assisted by SSVF in 2013 (17% of the total number of Veterans served) had been deployed as part of OEF, OIF, or OND. This was the highest proportion of OEF/OIF/OND Veterans served by any VA homeless initiative and was also higher than the relative number of OEF/OIF/OND Veterans in the overall Veteran population.

Figure 2- Veterans served by Age, FY 2013

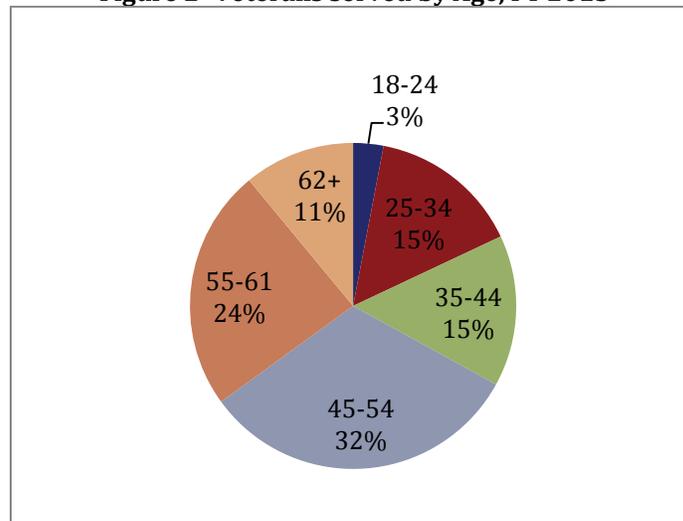
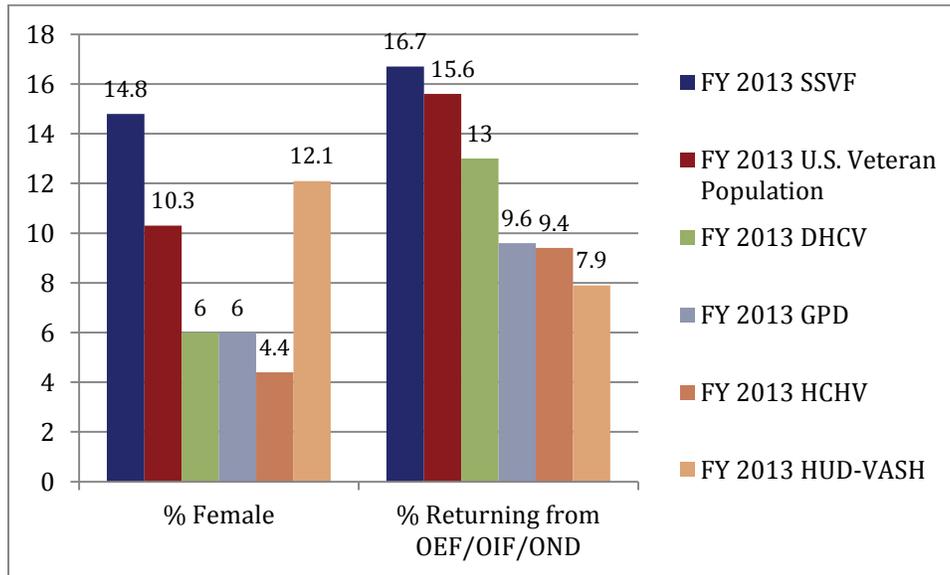


Figure 3-Percentage of Female and OEF/OIF/OND Veterans Among SSVF Veteran Participants, Veterans in the U.S. Veterans Population and Veterans Served by Other VA Homeless Programs



Note: DHCV=VA Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans Program; GPD=VA Grant and Per Diem Program; HCHV=VA Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program

Serving High-Need Groups

Beyond the priority target populations, SSVF assisted large number of Veterans in several other high-need groups. For example, more than half (55%) of Veterans assisted through SSVF had a disabling condition, along with one-fifth (21%) of non-Veteran adults. These figures point to the success of the SSVF program in helping some of the most needy Veterans, many of whom are affected by post-traumatic stress disorder (23%), mental illness such as depression (45%), substance abuse disorders (44%) and chronic medical conditions including cardiac conditions (51%).² In addition, as Figure 2 shows, the majority of Veterans (56%) served by SSVF in FY 2013 were between the ages of 45 to 61, and roughly 1 in every 10 Veterans served was aged 62 and above. Serving these older Veterans is important as they may have more complicated medical needs than both their younger counterparts and their same-aged peers who have not experienced homelessness or housing instability.

SSVF PROGRAM OUTCOMES

High Rate of Successful Exits to Permanent Housing

The SSVF program was highly successful in helping Veterans obtain or retain permanent housing in both FY 2012 and FY 2013. Overall, among persons who exited SSVF programs in FY 2013, 84% (41,104) successfully exited to a permanent housing destination, including 24,216 Veterans. Notwithstanding the doubling of SSVF persons served in year two, the permanent housing success rate for exiting persons was relatively unchanged at 84%, compared to 85% in year one. Figure 4 shows that the rate of exit to permanent housing varied somewhat depending on household and

² US Department of Veterans Affairs, VHA Support Service Center.

service type but, in all cases, the vast majority of persons receiving SSVF exited to a permanent housing destination.

Figure 4-Adult SSVF Participants Exiting to Permanent Housing, By Household and Assistance Type, FY 2013

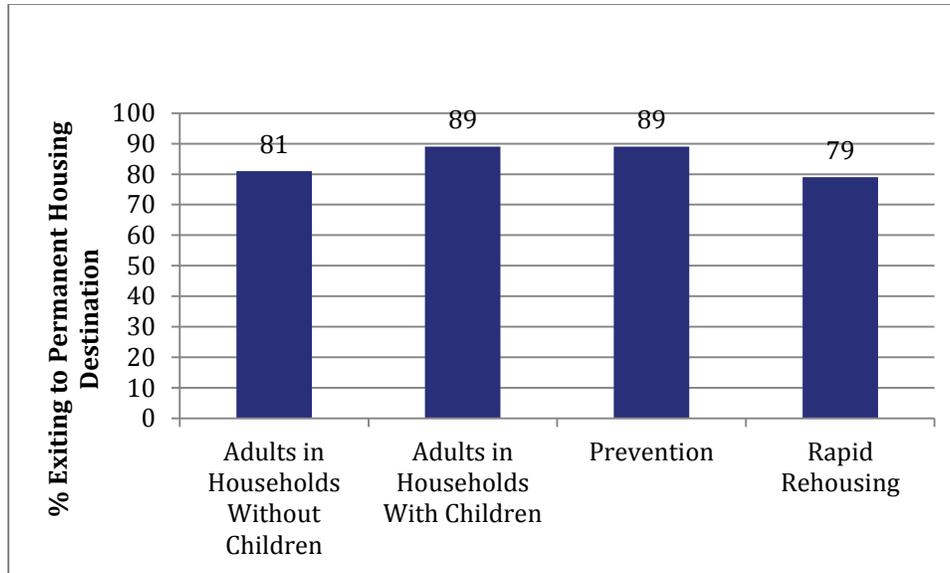


Figure 5 shows the destination at exit among all persons who successfully exited to permanent housing (PH) in FY 2012 and FY 2013. In FY 2013, the majority (60%) were in unsubsidized rental housing at program exit. Just over one quarter (26%) remained in or moved to a rental unit with a HUD-VA Supportive Housing (VASH) subsidy with an additional 2% having exited or retained units in other permanent supportive housing projects. Housing units with other housing subsidy programs accounted for nearly 8% of PH exits. Comparatively, there was a decrease in the proportion of exiters in rental housing subsidized with VASH from FY 2012 (32%) to FY 2013 (26%). That corresponds with a relative increase in the proportion of PH exiters to unsubsidized rental housing, from 53% in FY 2012 to 60% in FY 2013.

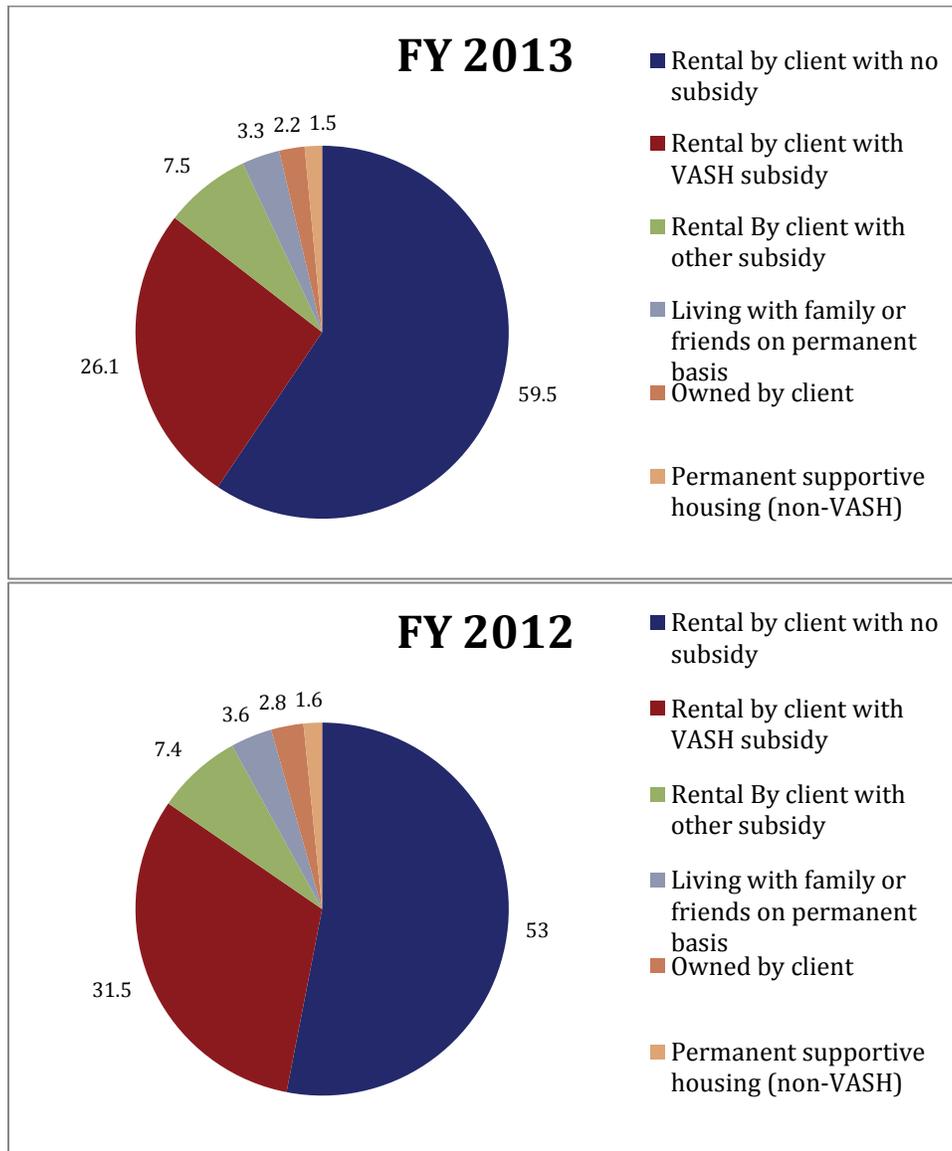
Quick Stabilization of Households

The SSVF program also succeeded well in quickly stabilizing or re-housing the households that it assisted. The overall median length of service for FY 2013 was 90 days, and Figure 6 shows that the majority of households receiving both prevention and rapid re-housing exited the program after receiving services for three months or less. Very few households (10% of prevention participants and 13% of rapid re-housing participants) received assistance from the SSVF program for more than 180 days.

High Rate of Success in Avoiding Returns to Homelessness

A key measure of effectiveness for programs serving the homeless and those at high risk of homelessness is whether its clients can avoid falling into homelessness after their stay in that program has been completed. Based on this measure, results from the SSVF program indicate that it is highly successful. Figure 7 shows rates of returns to VA homeless programs over time for Veterans who exited SSVF to permanent housing in FY 2013. After one year, success rates in

Figure 5-Permanent Housing Destinations of SSVF Exiters, FY 2012-FY 2013



avoiding returns to VA homeless programs were highest for Veterans in households with children. Among these households, those receiving homelessness prevention achieved a 95% success rate, while those receiving rapid re-housing assistance garnered a 93% success rate. Single Veterans who exited to PH achieved high, but slightly lower success rates, with 90% and 88% avoiding returns to VA homeless programs who received homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing assistance, respectively. Importantly, there was little difference in returns to homelessness between Veterans who received prevention assistance over rapid re-housing assistance with respect to each

household type. Also of interest, these results are highly consistent with FY 2012 data despite the doubling of Veterans served in year two.³

Figure 6--Length of SSVF Participation Among SSVF Veteran Participants, FY 2013

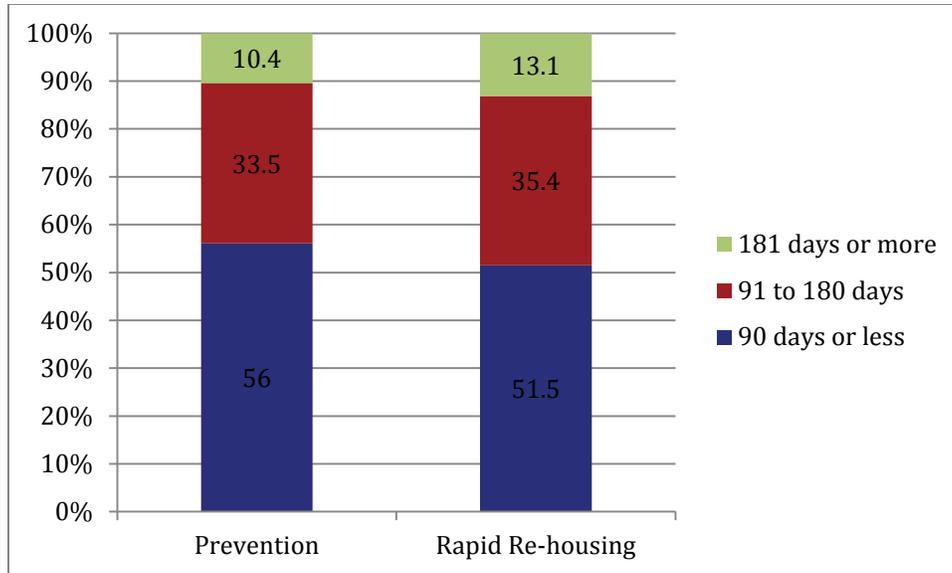
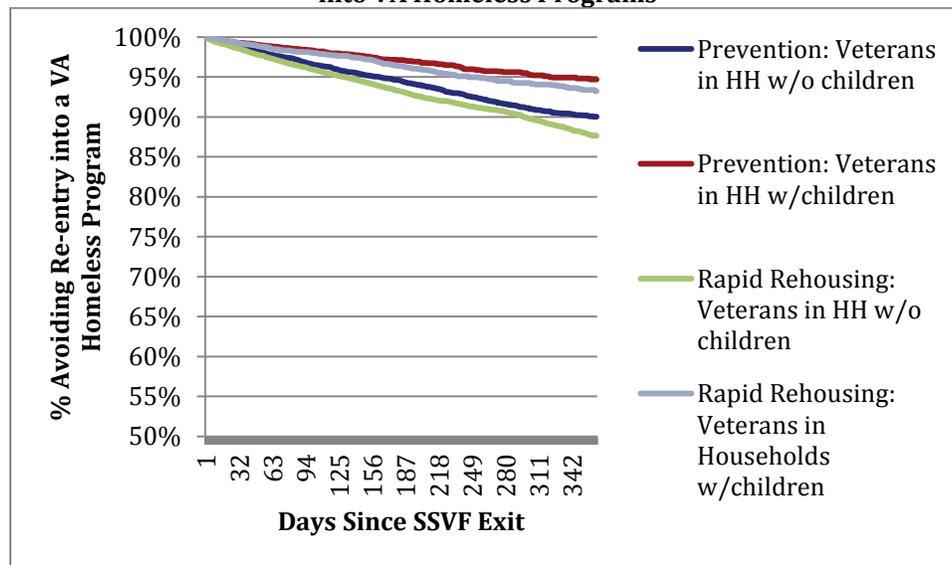


Figure 7- FY 2013 SSVF Veteran Participants with Permanent Housing Destinations Avoiding Re-Entry into VA Homeless Programs



³ Byrne, T. (2014 February). Housing Outcomes of Veterans Following Exit from the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program. VA National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans Research Brief. Retrieved from [http://www.endveteranhomelessness.org/sites/default/files/Housing Outcomes of Veterans Following Exit from the Supportive Services for Veteran Families Feb 2014.pdf](http://www.endveteranhomelessness.org/sites/default/files/Housing%20Outcomes%20of%20Veterans%20Following%20Exit%20from%20the%20Supportive%20Services%20for%20Veteran%20Families%20Feb%202014.pdf)

SUMMARY AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

The SSVF program has quickly become a vital component of VA's strategy to prevent and end homelessness among Veterans. The program has assisted a substantial number of Veterans and families in its initial two years and its impact will continue to grow in the future. In helping to prevent homelessness before it occurs or re-housing as quickly as possible those who do become homeless, the SSVF program plays an important role in minimizing the possibility that Veterans and their family members will experience long-term homelessness. This is crucial, as long-term homelessness can have a substantial negative impact on the health, economic and social outcomes of Veterans. In addition, research shows that individuals experiencing chronic homelessness can, in some cases, consume more than \$40,000 per year in health, mental health, substance abuse, and other services. With an average cost per household of around \$2,400, the SSVF program is a sound investment in eliminating long-term homelessness. Future research will include comparisons to non Veterans, and other groups of Veterans, so as to assess the impact on homelessness duration and costs relative to not intervening.

It is also important to note that VA has worked with its community partners to identify best and promising practices. SSVF utilizes a flexible, collaborative, person-centered approach delivered by non profit community providers. The result is more timely access to and delivery of services that promote rapid housing stabilization and community reintegration at the highest level of independent functioning for the Veteran and his or her family member(s). Much of what has been learned has been codified on VA's "SSVF University" link, found at: <http://www.va.gov/homeless/ssvf/>. The SSVF University site offers practice standards that describe effective rapid re-housing and prevention services. Some of these standards will form the basis of accreditation standards soon to be adopted by the Commission of Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) and possibly other national accrediting bodies.

Despite the meaningful impact that the SSVF program has already had, there are certainly opportunities to refine the program and improve outcomes. One area of focus will be to more fully integrate employment and vocational services into the SSVF program model to help ensure that Veterans and their families are able to maintain housing stability. The program could leverage existing opportunities by linking Veterans to vocational programs that are already available through the VA, Department of Labor (DoL) and other agencies. Many grantees are already doing so, as evidenced by a recent survey in which 28% of grantees who responded reported that their agency received DoL funding to operate employment programs. Most of these grantees reported that such funding came from the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP), which is an "employment focused" program intended to provide Veterans with the services they need to re-enter the labor force. The overlap between SSVF and HVRP could be expanded in the future to help ensure Veterans receive both the housing and employment assistance that is suited to their needs. In addition, future rounds of SSVF funding could include funds intended specifically for piloting a range of other strategies for integrating employment assistance into the SSVF program, and the most promising of these strategies could then be scaled-up.

SSVF also serves large numbers of disabled Veterans for whom full-time employment may not be a practical option. For those who need income from entitlements and other benefits, SSVF is working to implement strategies designed to assist Veteran households to identify and obtain such resources as quickly as possible. The National Center is piloting newly developed online resources that will support SSVF grantees, providers, and consumers in navigating the complex range of potential benefit options available in their local communities. The goal of this effort is to help households identify their eligibility for specific benefits and apply for applicable resources.

Beyond an increased emphasis on employment and income resources, the SSVF program presents a unique opportunity for learning more about what combination of services work best for specific Veteran populations in either preventing or ending homelessness as quickly as possible. Over the past 18 months SSVF has employed a screener designed to more accurately target Veteran households at risk of homelessness. The SSVF program continues to provide an array of possible services ranging from case management, to linkages with VA healthcare, to financial assistance in the form of payment of utilities, security deposits, rent or support for other housing-related needs.

However, little is known about which services are most effective, and we are still honing our ability to effectively target those who would have become homeless without intervention. Future research will examine these issues more closely to refine how services are provided through the SSVF program. Conducting in-depth interviews with Veterans and their families could be an especially important feature of this research, shedding light, from the Veteran perspective, on which SSVF program components are driving the strong positive outcomes observed to date.

Similarly, future research will continue to track Veterans longitudinally following their exit from SSVF to better understand long-term outcomes. While some of this work has been conducted already, it will be critically important to continue to monitor the outcomes of Veterans and their families served by SSVF in order to determine how the program can be enhanced to better promote a positive housing trajectory over the long-term.

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Opinions expressed in this research brief represent only the position of the National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.