**Ending Veteran Homelessness in TX-601:**

**Policies and Procedures for a**

**Comprehensive System Response**

**Introduction and Background**

In 2010, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) introduced the first comprehensive federal strategy to prevent and end homelessness. This plan, called *Opening Doors*, outlined a number of goals related to ending homelessness in the U.S. – the first of these committed to ending Veteran homelessness by 2016.[[1]](#footnote-1)

In 2015, USICH, along with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), adopted a vision of what it means to end homelessness and shared specific criteria and benchmarks for ending Veteran homelessness in order to help guide communities as they take action to achieve the goal, with a focus on long-term, lasting solutions.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In line with the federal goals outlined in *Opening Doors*, the TX-601Continuum of Care has committed to a goal of effectively ending Veteran homelessness in the CoC. To that end, TX-601 has focused recent efforts on integrating the Veteran Initiative into the Coordinated Entry System (CES) process, ensuring all identified veteran’s are included on the By-Name List and have an up-to-date assessment for CES and setting targeted, system level goals to rapidly house veterans.

TX-601has determined that ending Veteran homelessness in our CoC means the following:

*Where Veteran homelessness does occur, it is rare, brief, and non-recurring. More specifically, every identified homeless Veteran who is unsheltered is immediately offered access to low-barrier shelter, and every Veteran who is unsheltered or in emergency shelter, Safe Havens, or Transitional Housing in the TX-601 is immediately offered access to low-barrier permanent housing placement and stabilization assistance. Veterans who accept assistance will be re-housed within an average of 90 days. To achieve this, TX-601 is committed to the principles of Housing First, which means our system is primarily focused on quick placement into permanent housing, respecting Veteran choice, and targeting our resources to those with greatest needs.*

Using the federal criteria and benchmarks as our guide, this document includes policies and procedures for a coordinated and standardized response to Veteran homelessness across our entire community.

**Applicability**

All homeless assistance projects in TX-601,regardless of funding source, are expected to adhere to the policies and procedures outlined in this document. This includes programs represented in all system components, including: street outreach, coordinated entry access point(s), emergency shelters/Safe Haven, transitional housing, rapid re-housing, permanent supportive housing, and homelessness prevention providers.

**Responsibility for Leadership**

The TX-601Veterans Leadership Task Force is charged with establishing the strategic direction of the local effort to end veteran homelessness, managing the TX-601 Veteran by-name list, ensuring that the policies and procedures outlined in this document are implemented appropriately at the system, provider, and client level, and regularly monitoring progress towards the ending Veteran homelessness goal.

TX-601Veterans Leadership Task Force membership includes representation from:

* Catholic Charities SSVF
* Department of Housing and Urban Development
* DRC Solutions
* Family Endeavors SSVF
* Veteran’s Administration
* MHMR
* Presbyterian Night Shelter
* The Salvation Army
* City of Fort Worth
* Tarrant County Homeless Coalition

The Veteran Leadership Task Force meets bi-monthly.

**Responsibility for Implementation**

The TX-601Veterans Case Conference Group is charged with identifying homeless veterans, ensuring collected data is accurate and up-to-date, assisting with the assessment of all veterans for CES and monitoring the navigation and housing process. As community needs arise, this committee will respond as appropriate.

TX-601Veterans Case Conference Group membership includes representation from:

* Veteran’s Administration
* **Presbyterian Night Shelter**
* **The Salvation Army**
* **Family Endeavors**
* **Catholic Charities**
* **Arlington Life Shelter**
* **Arlington Housing Authority**
* **Tarrant County Homeless Coalition**

**The Veteran Case Conferencing Group meets on a bi-monthly basis.**

**Responsibility for Housing & Navigation Placement**

The TX-601 Coordinated Entry System (CES) is responsible for managing the HomeBase report, overseeing the client navigation process and managing the available housing inventory process to ensure appropriate assignments are made to available beds or placements.

The CES hosts weekly case conference meetings to identify challenges and barriers in the system, identify available beds, and assign clients to those beds.

**TX-601 Homeless Veterans By-Name List**

The TX-601Homeless Veterans by-list is the primary means used to identify and track all currently homeless Veterans (in shelters, Safe Havens, transitional housing, or unsheltered) in the CoC’s area and to report on current housing plans and movement towards permanent housing. The TX-601HMIS is the primary data source for the by-name list and includes multiple data fields necessary to identify and track assistance and outcomes for individual Veterans.

The Veteran by-name list is pulled from HMIS and reviewed for accuracy weekly. The list is used to track benchmark related data points as well as identifying those who have not been assessed for CES prioritization. The list is housed on a secure website, [www.basecamp.com](http://www.basecamp.com), and access is only granted to approved, Veteran service providers.

**Identifying Homeless Veterans**

1. **Policy** – All literally homeless Veterans in the TX-601geographic area are immediately identified
	1. **Procedure** – The VA engages in street outreach in the community within their service area on a weekly basis, as appropriate, for purposes of identifying all unsheltered homeless Veterans. Non-VA street outreach teams ensure that relevant data is captured when an individual self-identifies as a veteran.
		1. When an unsheltered client is willing, the outreach worker will conduct an assessment so the veteran information will populate on the veteran by-name list and the CES HomeBase list.
	2. **Procedure** – TX-601 staff identify all homeless Veterans residing in local non-HMIS participating ES projects
		1. SSVF grantees engage in monthly in-reach to non-HMIS participating ES and TH projects in their service area for purposes of identifying homeless Veterans
			1. SSVF grantees may develop formal referral relationships and protocol with local non-HMIS participating ES providers. But if local ES/TH providers cannot maintain regular referrals, weekly in-reach to those projects should happen.
				1. All identified sheltered homeless Veterans are either entered into HMIS once they become SSVF clients, or are added to the Veteran by-name list by the SSVF provider using a unique identifier, if they are not yet a client
	3. **Procedure** – Staff will run the Veteran by-name list on a weekly basis and share the report, with newly homeless Veterans clearly identified
	4. **Procedure** – VA staff identifying and/or assisting literally homeless Veterans may ensure those Veterans get added to the Veteran by-name list in one of the following ways:
		1. VA staff with HMIS credentials may check HMIS to see if the homeless Veteran is already in HMIS
			1. If so, the Veteran is already on the Veteran by-name list
			2. If not, VA staff enters the client data into HMIS (that client-level data is then pulled into the Veteran by-name list)
2. **Policy** – All literally homeless Veterans identified in TX-601are tracked on the Veteran by-name list
	1. **Procedure** – TCHCstaff maintain and populate the TX-601Veteran by-name list
		1. TCHCstaff run the Homeless Vets Report out of HMIS on a weekly basis, update the Veteran by-name list, and inform all identified Responsible Providers when available and posted on BaseCamp.com
			1. The report includes data on all literally homeless Veterans in the CoC (Vets in ES, TH, and unsheltered) who have been active within the prior 90 days
			2. HMIS serves as the primary data source for the Veteran by-name list, although Veteran Case Conferencing Workgroup members may add identified Veterans who may not be residing in an HMIS participating shelter or who may be unsheltered
				1. VA staff with HMIS credentials will add literally homeless Veterans they have identified to the Veteran by-name list if not already populated on the report, per procedure 1d, above.
	2. **Procedure** – TX-601ensures all Veteran’s on the by-name list are assessed for CES
		1. Veteran Case Conferencing co-chairs review assessment data on the by-name list to identify those who do not have assessment
		2. Veteran Case Conferencing co-chairs assign responsibility to appropriate service providers to complete assessment process
		3. Assessment updates are provided and reviewed on the subsequent Veteran by-name list
	3. **Procedure** – Veteran Case Conferencing co-chairs review the Veteran by-name list on a weekly basis
		1. If a veteran has had no active service within the CoC in 90 days or more, they will be updated to “inactive” on the Veteran by-name list
3. **Policy** – All literally homeless Veterans identified in TX-601are will be incorporated into the CES process
	1. As homeless veterans are identified upon entry to the homeless system, they should receive an assessment, including the HUD Assessment and VI-SPDAT to ensure they are included in the CES priority listing to access housing resources.
	2. Veterans can be assessed at the following:
		1. A designated access point
		2. Homeless helpline
		3. Outreach workers if living in available an unsheltered situation
		4. Participants in the Veteran Case Conference group
		5. Targeted efforts by the CoC to ensure all Veterans have been assessed
	3. Homeless veterans have been identified by TX-601 to be prioritized at the top of the CES list and will be first to receive navigation and housing referrals as the resources become available.
		1. Veterans will be guided to Veteran specific housing resources first, when available. When Veteran specific housing resources are unavailable, Veterans will be referred to available units in the general CoC pool.
	4. CES specific protocol can be found in the [Coordinated Entry Operations Manual](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CTammy%5CAppData%5CLocal%5CMicrosoft%5CWindows%5CINetCache%5CCoordinated%20Entry%5CProcedures%5CCES%20Operations%20Manual%20revised%2012-14-17.docx)

**Providing Immediate Shelter to Unsheltered Homeless Veterans**

1. **Policy** – TX-601 provides shelter immediately to any Veteran experiencing homelessness who wants it.
	1. **Procedure** – All state and federally funded TX-601 ES projects must comply with the this policy, which requires system-wide housing first orientation
	2. **Procedure** – Local dedicated street outreach teams assist in moving unsheltered homeless Veterans into local emergency shelters
		1. If local shelters are full, SSVF providers may pay for a temporary stay in a local hotel/motel for the unsheltered homeless Veteran, where the Veteran is eligible and following SSVF requirements and availability of funding
		2. If unsheltered Veterans decline the shelter offer because of excessive barriers to entry, program staff working with the Veteran will contact TCHC staff to report the issue and will assist program staff to advocate on behalf of the unsheltered homeless Veteran
			1. If the issues with local shelter barriers to entry cannot be immediately resolved, SSVF grantees may pay for a temporary stay in a local hotel/motel for the unsheltered homeless Veteran, where the Veteran is eligible and following SSVF requirements and availability of funding
	3. **Procedure** – If an unsheltered homeless Veteran declines a shelter offer for reasons other than excessive barriers to entry, local dedicated street outreach teams will make offers of shelter to the unsheltered homeless Veteran on a bi-weekly basis, at minimum.
		1. In extreme weather situations, shelter offers must be made every three days, at minimum.
2. **Policy** – TX-601 homeless services providers assisting unsheltered homeless Veterans will document offers of shelter
	1. **Procedure** - Local dedicated street outreach teams or other providers assisting unsheltered homeless Veterans, document the offers of shelter they make to veterans
		1. Documentation is made on the Veteran by-name list and includes identifying the date of the shelter offer, whether the veteran accepted or declined, and reasons for a decline

**Housing Focused System**

1. **Policy** – TX-601 is committed to immediately providing permanent housing (PH) to all homeless Veterans who desire it, regardless of perceived needs or issues
	1. **Procedure** – When a homeless veteran presents to the TX-601 homeless service system, service providers have 14 days to ensure that the veteran is assessed for CES, which includes the HUD Assessment and the VI-SPDAT. Homeless veterans presenting in unsheltered settings should be assessed as soon as they are willing.
	2. **Procedure** – For Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) beds, TX-601 prioritizes housing all chronically homeless veterans first. Once all identified chronically homeless veterans have been housed, TX-601 will prioritized housing veterans with the longest length of time in homelessness for PSH.
2. **Policy** – TX-601 provides Service Intensive Transitional Housing (TH), including VA Grant and Per Diem (GPD), in limited instances or as a short-term bridge to PH
	1. **Procedure** - Homeless Veterans are only assisted with Service Intensive TH in the following situations:
		1. The Veteran is homeless and has a self-identified need for intensive services that the Veteran believes can be provided by a particular GPD project
			1. If a homeless Veteran requests to move into a TH bed provided by a TX-601 GPD provider, the emergency shelter provider may contact GPD providers directly for possible referral.
		2. The Veteran accepted an offer of PH, either Permanent Supportive Housing or RRH, but the PH unit is not immediately available.
			1. In this situation, a Veteran may be moved into a TH unit while waiting for the PH unit to become available, rather than remaining in the emergency shelter or in an unsheltered location
				1. Once a PH offer has been made, accepted, and documented in the Veteran by-name list by the appropriate Provider Responsible, additional offers of PH do not need to made or documented
	2. **Procedure** – Where a homeless Veteran has chosen to move into a TH project because of the desire for intensive services, the TH provider must make new offers of assisted PH to the Veteran on a bi-weekly basis. The dates of the PH offer and the Veterans’ acceptance or decline of that offer must be reported in the Homeless Vets By-Name list
		1. The TH provider responsible for assisting the homeless Veteran will report on the status of the housing plan in the Homeless Vets By-Name list
	3. **Procedure** – Homeless Veterans residing in GPD programs are immediately offered a CES assessment and SSFV eligibility assessment determination upon entry into the project
		1. SSFV providers will conduct assessments 2 days per week
		2. Assessed and approved Veterans will use GPD as bridge housing
3. **Policy** – TX-601 service providers will provide support, information, and targeted assistance to previously assisted Veterans to help minimize returns to homelessness
	1. **Procedure** – TX-601 housing providers will provide information, including contact information, to assisted homeless Veterans to ensure they know whom to contact if they become at risk of homelessness after housing assistance ends
	2. **Procedure** – TX-601 providers make follow-up contact with all clients at least once after the client’s exit from the program and into housing
		1. Follow-up contact occurs between one and six months after dismissal from a housing program
		2. Follow-up contact occurs between one and six months after the termination of financial assistance
		3. If initial attempts at contact are unsuccessful, providers make multiple attempts at contact, using multiple methods (e.g., phone, email, letter, in-person visits)
	3. **Procedure** – TX-601 providers will assess and prioritize for assistance those homeless Veterans who have been assisted in the past and are eligible for assistance again.

**Coordination between the CoC and the VA at the System and Project Level**

1. **Policy** – VA-funded SSVF, GPD and VASH projects and providers coordinate with non VA-funded RRH and PSH providers to ensure homeless Veterans enter permanent housing swiftly and in a way that most efficiently uses community resources
	1. **Procedure** - When literally homeless Veterans are identified by a homeless assistance provider, the provider will ensure that client data is entered into HMIS
	2. **Procedure** – TX-601 RRH and PSH providers will prioritize for their services eligible, literally homeless Veterans who are not eligible for VA-funded assistance, such as that provided by SSVF or VASH, or when VA-funded assistance is at capacity
2. **Policy** –SSVF, GPD, and other homeless assistance providers regularly identifying and assisting homeless Veterans engage in regular community meetings with local VA staff for purposes of identifying and providing assistance to local homeless Veterans, including the Veteran Leadership and Veteran Case Conferencing groups.

**Monitoring System and Provider Capacity to End Veteran Homelessness**

1. **Policy** – TX-601 monitors provider and system capacity to ensure the CoC maintains resources to move homeless Veterans into PH quickly
	1. **Procedure** - On a quarterly basis at minimum, CoC staff will survey SSVF grantees to ensure ongoing ability and capacity to serve all eligible, literally homeless veterans
		1. The survey will review quarterly goals targets in relation to performance and financial capacity
	2. **Procedure** - On a monthly basis at minimum, CoC staff will review and share data about the CoC’s progress on the federal benchmarks demonstrating ending Veteran homelessness
2. **Policy** – The Veterans Leadership Task Force monitors progress on the federal benchmarks for ending Veteran homelessness to ensure the sustainability of the CoC’s system response and identify any problems or issue areas
	1. **Procedure** – On a bi-monthly basis at minimum, CoC staff will monitor and report on the following data:
		1. Federal Benchmarks (per the federal specifications)
			1. Number of Actively Homeless Veterans
			2. Number of Chronically Homeless Veterans
			3. Number of Long-Term Homeless Veterans
			4. Average length of time to house Veterans
			5. Number of Veterans exiting to PH vs. number of Veterans entering homelessness
			6. Number of Veterans entering TH vs. number of Veterans entering homelessness
		2. VASH utilization rates
		3. VASH time to house homeless Veterans (average days)
		4. Returns to homelessness across all project types
		5. Number/rate of homeless Veterans served by non-VA funded programs

**Implementation of and Compliance with Policies and Procedures**

Upon adoption by the TX-601 CoC Board, staff will distribute these policies and procedures to the full CoC membership (via email listserv and posting on TCHC website, www.ahomewithhope.org) and host a webinar to introduce and explain them. CoC staff will also work with regional representatives to the CoC Board, SSVF providers, and others as appropriate to develop plans for facilitating ongoing local conversations and provision of technical assistance to CoC providers related to implementation of and compliance with these policies and procedures.

TX-601homeless assistance providers must comply with these policies and procedures within 60 days of their release. Any exceptions must receive approval from the Veteran Leadership Committee.

Initially, monitoring for provider compliance with these policies and procedures will be done primarily via check-ins and reporting in the Veteran Leadership Task Force meetings, and through informal surveys of providers across TX-601. Over time, monitoring for compliance with these policies and procedures will be incorporated into a standardized tool and process.

Lastly, lack of compliance may be identified in the data monitoring/analysis processes outlined in the *Monitoring Provider and System Capacity* section above. The Veteran Leadership Committee may recommend technical assistance or performance improvement plans as needed.

**Common Terminology and Definitions**

* Assessment
	+ A requirement to participate in the Coordinated Entry System. An assessment includes the HUD Assessment as well as the VI-SPDAT. The HUD Assessment must be updated every 90 days to remain active in Coordinated Entry.
* Continuum of Care (CoC)
	+ CoC refers to the both planning body that coordinates the provision of housing and services for homeless families and individuals in a defined geographic area, as well as the geographic area itself.
		- The TX-601Continuum of Care includes Tarrant and Parker County
* HomeBase Report
	+ An HMIS generated report that includes all homeless participants who have been assessed for the Coordinated Entry System. Veterans have been prioritized by TX-601 to be at the top of the HomeBase report so they will receive housing options prior to other homeless subpopulations.
* HMIS: Homeless Management Information Systems
	+ The CoC’s data system that houses client-level data on all persons assisted by HMIS participating homeless assistance providers in the CoC
	+ TX-601 utilizes Efforts To Outcomes (ETO) as its local HMIS
* Emergency Shelter
	+ Any facility for which the primary purpose is to provide a temporary shelter for the homeless in general or for specific populations of the homeless and which does not require occupants to sign leases or occupancy agreements. Homeless status is an eligibility requirement and homelessness is documented.
* Grant Per Diem (GPD)
	+ VA funded housing supports exclusive to Veterans.
* Rapid Re-Housing
	+ A homeless assistance project type that quickly moves households out of homelessness and into permanent housing through the provision of case management services and limited financial assistance as needed. Homeless status is an eligibility requirement and homelessness is documented.
* Transitional Housing
	+ A homeless assistance project type that provides households with up to 24 months of housing and services assistance. Homeless status is an eligibility requirement and homelessness is documented.
* Permanent Housing Assistance (i.e., “permanent housing intervention”)
	+ A subsidy or other form of rental assistance, with appropriate services and supports. Interventions can include HUD-VASH, SSVF, and CoC Program-funded rapid re-housing (where rental assistance is included), CoC Program-funded permanent supportive housing, Housing Choice voucher (HCV), or other form of permanent housing subsidy or rental assistance.
* Permanent Supportive Housing
	+ Permanent supportive housing is permanent housing with indefinite leasing or rental assistance paired with supportive services to assist homeless persons with a disability or families with an adult or child member with a disability achieve housing stability. Homeless status is an eligibility requirement and homelessness is documented.
* Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF)
	+ VA funded rapid rehousing and homeless prevention program exclusive to Veterans
* Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH)
	+ VA funded permanent supportive housing exclusive to Veterans
* Veteran
	+ A Veteran is someone who, regardless of discharge status, has served on active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States. This does not include inactive military reserves or the National Guard unless the person was called up to active duty.
* Veteran By-Name List
	+ An HMIS generated list inclusive of all known homeless veterans in TX-601. The list includes data elements necessary to measure USICH benchmarks required to end Veteran homelessness.
1. Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness - <https://www.usich.gov/opening-doors> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Achieving the Goal of Ending Veteran Homelessness: Criteria and Benchmarks - <https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/criteria-for-ending-veteran-homelessness/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)