

NOVEMBER 2022

The Homeless Programs Office (HPO) newsletter contains news and information about VA's ongoing effort to prevent and end homelessness among Veterans.



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Veterans who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness are strongly encouraged to contact the [National Call Center for Homeless Veterans](#) at (877) 4AID-VET (877-424-3838) for assistance.

Message From Monica Diaz, Executive Director, VHA Homeless Programs Office



With a fulfilling and stable civilian life, Billy Truesdell did not consider being a Veteran to be an integral part of his identity. But when the Navy Veteran unexpectedly found himself without a place to live, a job, or a support system, he reassessed.

"I had no pride. I had nothing," he recalls.

Even when it felt like he had nothing else, Billy still knew he had something valuable: he was a Veteran.

"Now, I owe that title," he recently told us.

Just as Billy had protected his country in 1986, he learned that VA was standing by, ready to protect him from the challenges he faced nearly 4 decades later.

Today, Billy is thriving—and he’s committed to helping other Veterans do the same as a peer support specialist with VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System.

I think about Billy’s words, “I owe that title,” often.

The title “Veteran” distinguishes the individuals who have raised their hand and taken the oath to defend our nation. Through decades of war and peace, these oaths have echoed across recruitment offices from all corners of the country, and they have been heard around the world. I believe these words—taken today entirely voluntarily—are quite literally the sound of freedom ringing.

[Read Monica's full message.](#)

Around HPO



[Ending Veteran Homelessness Podcast: How VA Puts Smartphones Into the Hands of Homeless Veterans](#)

At the start of the COVID-19 public health emergency, VA staff nationwide were asked to decrease face-to-face encounters with Veterans, pivoting to things like telehealth and video calls while helping them find housing. But how do you do telehealth with somebody who can't get online? How do you stay in touch with someone you're charged with caring for when it isn't safe to see them in person?

On this month's [Ending Veteran Homelessness podcast](#), we speak with Jennifer Nemeth, Business Operations and Staffing Coordinator for the VHA Homeless Programs Office, about how VA has helped Veterans stay connected to VA services through the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Infectious Disease Winter Planning and Preparedness](#)

As more people move indoors for colder weather, it is important to maintain strong infection prevention and control practices to avoid infection. HUD recently released a [new resource on the HUD Exchange](#) for homeless service providers in preparation for colder weather.



[With E-Bike from VA, No More Walking to Work](#)

Veteran Donald Bowman was surprised when VA offered him an e-bike—something that would transform his long commute to work on foot. He was more surprised to learn that his VA social worker had already been riding alongside him on his journey for more than a decade. [Read the full story.](#)

[Driving Privilege Restoration Program: An Innovative Practice in VHA Homeless Program Operations](#)

When Veterans lack driver's licenses or have other driving restrictions imposed upon them, they often experience other negative impacts, such as difficulty attending medical appointments, accessing resources to address basic needs, or maintaining employment. The Hershel "Woody" Williams VA Medical Center has been identified as a site with an innovative practice in helping Veterans overcome transportation barriers resulting from revoked driving privileges. [Read the full white paper.](#)



[Funding Opportunities to Help Veterans Experiencing Homelessness](#)

As a part of ongoing efforts to end Veteran homelessness, VA is offering new grants for FY2024 that will provide critical resources to help Veterans experiencing homelessness and their families. [Read the full press release.](#)

[Under Secretary for Health's Robert L. Jesse Award](#)

Each year, the Under Secretary for Health's Robert L. Jesse Award recognizes innovative practices within VA. This year, Charles Franklin received this award for spearheading the Rideshare program, which provides expanded transportation to eligible Veterans through a collaborative that uses Uber or Lyft transportation. [Watch the video](#) to learn more.



Health Update



VA is now offering [updated bivalent COVID-19 boosters](#) to individuals 12 and older who have completed a COVID-19 vaccine primary series. This updated booster protects against both the original virus as well as the BA.4 and BA.5 Omicron subvariants.

Individuals who have completed a primary series, including those who have received booster doses and whose last shot was at least 2 months ago, are eligible for the updated booster. Given the fast spread of the Omicron variant and significantly improved protection with prior boosters, getting an updated booster as soon as you are eligible is critical.

[Click here](#) for information on getting your COVID-19 primary vaccine series or bivalent booster through VA.

HPO Staff Spotlight: Gregory Stanton

As a Community Employment Coordinator, or CEC, Gregory Stanton works closely with community partners to establish relationships that will benefit Veterans in need of employment. He also has the opportunity to provide direct services to Veterans experiencing homelessness—a place he once found himself years prior.



Stanton finds that experience with homelessness has helped give him a level of sensitivity when working with Veterans, knowing that if circumstances were slightly different, he could be in their shoes.

[Learn more](#) about Stanton's experience working with Veterans, and why he continues working to spark possibility where it seems to be impossible.

HPO Fact of the Month



From May 2021 through September 2022, VA medical centers nationwide directly helped more than 43,500 Veterans using nearly \$6.7 million in funding through the expanded flexibilities authorized by the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, MD Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act.

During [Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week](#), learn about how the [flexible assistance](#) has benefited Veterans in the form of groceries, meals, apartment start-up kits, furniture, Goodwill merchandise vouchers, laundry vouchers, and more.