

Highlights of [GAO-12-726](#), a report to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

According to a HUD and VA report, veterans are overrepresented among the homeless population. The HUD-VASH program combines rental assistance for homeless veterans in the form of section 8 Housing Choice vouchers provided by HUD with case management and clinical services provided by VA at VAMCs and community-based outpatient clinics. This collaborative initiative between the two agencies is intended to target the most vulnerable, most needy, and chronically homeless veterans. GAO was asked to examine (1) how VA and HUD determine veteran eligibility for HUD-VASH, (2) what data VA and HUD collect and report on HUD-VASH and their data reliability efforts, and (3) what is known about HUD-VASH performance.

To address these objectives, GAO reviewed HUD-VASH program requirements and reported program data through March 2012; and interviewed VA and HUD headquarters officials, staff at a non-representative sample of 10 VAMCs and 10 PHAs, and representatives of organizations that advocate for veterans or individuals experiencing homelessness.

GAO makes no recommendations in this report. HUD, VA, and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness generally agreed with GAO's conclusions.

View [GAO-12-726](#) For more information, contact Alicia Puente Cackley at (202) 512-8678 or [cackleya@gao.gov](mailto:cackleya@gao.gov).

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## VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

### VA and HUD Are Working to Improve Data on Supportive Housing Program

#### What GAO Found

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) rely on VA medical centers (VAMC) and public housing agencies (PHA) that serve veterans directly to determine participant eligibility for the HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program. VAMC staff GAO contacted said that they interview veterans interested in the HUD-VASH program to assess whether the veteran met the program's definition of homelessness, check VA's electronic patient record system to determine whether the veteran was eligible for VA health care, and obtain the veteran's agreement to participate in case management. VAMCs refer eligible veterans to partnering PHAs (subject to rental assistance voucher availability) and are required to place them on an interest list when no vouchers are available. PHA staff GAO contacted said that they compare the veteran's reported income to information provided by third-party sources, such as the Social Security Administration, to verify that the veteran's household income did not exceed HUD-VASH program limits and check state sex offender registries to help ensure that no member of the veteran's household was subject to a lifetime registration requirement.

VA and HUD collect various data on veteran participation and voucher utilization and are taking steps to address the reliability of data collected and reported on HUD-VASH. Since 2008, VA has used an electronic database referred to as the Dashboard to collect and report various data, such as the number of veterans issued a voucher and seeking housing and the number of veterans housed. VA described taking a number of steps intended to help ensure the reliability of Dashboard-based reports, including routine reviews of underlying reports. VA expects to fully implement reporting based on data collected with its new Homeless Operations Management and Evaluation System (HOMES) by July 2012. According to VA, HOMES incorporates additional data reliability controls, such as data fields that automatically limit responses to predefined ranges. HUD also collects data on HUD-VASH voucher utilization, although HUD officials acknowledged discrepancies between VA and HUD data. VA and HUD are working to finalize an information-sharing agreement intended to help the departments better identify the source of the discrepancies and validate reports based on HOMES data.

HUD-VASH data show that the program has moved previously homeless veterans into housing. As of March 2012, nearly 31,200 veterans lived in HUD-VASH supported housing (about 83 percent of the rental assistance vouchers authorized under the program). The program goal is to have veterans in housing represent 88 percent of authorized vouchers by September 2012; several states had met or exceeded the goal as of March 2012. VAMC and PHA staff GAO contacted also cited challenges in administering the HUD-VASH program, including a lack of resources to assist veterans with moving into housing. In April 2012, HUD released a best practices document that illustrated how some of the challenges identified had been addressed. For example, one PHA applied for county Community Development Block Grant funds to assist veterans with security and utility deposits.