



PHA Profile: District of Columbia Housing Authority Veterans Housing Choice Voucher Streamlining Initiative

Basic PHA Stats

Location: District of Columbia
Housing Choice Vouchers: 13,917
Public Housing Apartments: 8,038

Program Description

Historically, navigating the process for obtaining a Housing Choice Voucher had been difficult for any homeless client in Washington, DC. When the District of Columbia Housing Authority (DCHA) wanted to serve veterans through HUD-VASH, they and their partners identified 537 homeless veterans living on the streets and in shelters through a Vulnerability Index survey. Together they identified the 105 most vulnerable, chronically homeless veterans. To assist these veterans with multiple challenges, DCHA made necessary changes alleviating the multiple documentation requirements and strict deadlines in the application and lease-up process that were often barriers.

DCHA partnered with its local Continuum of Care, led by the DC Department of Human Services (DHS) and managed by The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness (TCP). Together, these agencies successfully streamlined the eligibility determination and lease-up processes for VASH veterans through their “VASH-Plus” Program. They enlisted the help of the D.C. Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO) to develop a customized web-based project management software that allows all partners to exchange information on 1) the status of each participant’s housing application and 2) available apartments. As a result of their efforts, the average time from referral to lease-up was reduced from six months to one month.

A key accomplishment of the project is that, unlike the traditional voucher approval process, which is linear, many application and lease-up activities now progress simultaneously. Following is a summary of the steps included in the new application and housing search process. (Please see the attached “[DC VASH-Plus Overview](#)” for more information.)

Steps in the new application process:

1. DHS conducts a pre-eligibility screening of all clients.
2. DHS staff is cross trained in the DC Housing Authority (DCHA) approval process and helps applicants complete application forms.
3. DCHA gets an alert through the automated system, Quickbase, when a clients’ housing application is complete.
4. DCHA reviews the application, determines eligibility, and updates the database.

Steps in the new housing search process:

1. TCP identifies available apartments and lists them in the database.
2. The database alerts DCHA when a new unit is added, which triggers them to conduct a rent reasonableness assessment of the unit.
3. TCP negotiates the rental cost with the Landlord. Once the approved rent is agreed upon, TCP changes the status of the unit to “Requiring Inspection.”
4. DHS staff creates an inspection schedule for DCHA staff.
5. DCHA identifies approved units in the database.
6. DHS case managers take clients to select their new unit.
7. Once approved and housing secured, Veteran goes to the Housing Authority on lease-up day with their case manager and landlord and receives the keys to their new apartment.

Motivation

DCHA wanted to assist chronically homeless veterans in accessing housing as soon as possible.

Resources Required

This program did not require MTW status. While the program required additional resources in the inspection department, it saved time in the application process because applications were substantially complete at the time of submission. The PHA also saved resources in the rent negotiation process because TCP negotiates the rent with landlords.

Challenges

The main challenges were aligning the inter-agency processes to make them more efficient; the sharing of data among agencies to track progress of applications and lease-ups; managing the rent-reasonable and inspection process; and managing landlord expectations.

Rewards

DCHA says the ability to rapidly house veterans who were chronically homeless is the most rewarding part of implementing this program. Another success of the program is that it increased communication and efficiencies among DCHA and its partner agencies. DCHA was also able to reach out to more landlords and increase its pool of available units.

Partners

DCHA does not have written agreements with its partner organizations.

Partner Name	Type of Organization/ Role in Program
DC Department of Human Services (DHS)	Case management, pre-screening applications, coordinating unit viewings
The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness (TCP)	Identification of units, rent negotiations and other resources for veterans
Veterans Administration	Verified that the population served were indeed veterans

Documentation Changes Made

Document	Document Changes
Procedure Documents	Procedures that were adjusted for this program include 1) cross training of DHS staff to pre-screen voucher applications, 2) timing for inspection of unit, and 3) voucher issuance and lease-up timing.

Words of Wisdom from DC

“We feel this program has worked well and can be evidenced by the fact that all VASH vouchers were utilized. The key to successfully implementing such an effort is to have a comprehensive database to share with all partners.”

Contact Person for PHAs Interested in Implementing a Similar Program

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