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Houston Housing Authority leads unprecedented community-wide effort to effectively end veteran's homelessness

Over 3,650 homeless veterans have received housing and supportive services since 2012

HOUSTON– Three years after beginning an unprecedented Houston/Harris County initiative, the Houston Housing Authority (HHA) and our partners celebrate the effective end of veteran homelessness in Houston with an announcement by HUD Secretary Julian Castro, VA Secretary Robert McDonald, Labor Secretary Thomas Perez and Mayor Annise Parker on June 1st.

Housing Houston's Heroes, an initiative that began on May 29, 2012, was initially aimed at housing 100 chronically homeless individuals or families, at least 60 of whom were veterans, in 100 days. The vision expanded rapidly after that goal was met. This initiative was instrumental in establishing the foundation for transformation in the Houston veteran and homeless service provider community. Through May 2015, Houston has housed over 3,650 homeless veterans. This was accomplished by creating an environment where housing providers, the VA and the Continuum of Care (CoC) learned how to function as a single system in order to connect homeless veteran households to stable housing.

HHA, the largest housing provider involved, housed 1,000 of these veterans and their families. Today, every homeless veteran in our community has a permanent housing option available to them. Our system now consistently responds to a large steady state volume of veterans who experience housing instability, helping them rapidly return to housing.

Veteran homelessness in Houston has been addressed by developing and utilizing strategies to more rapidly and effectively help those who have served our county. The main system shifts include:

- Housing Authorities have had mass briefings to allow immediate access to HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) housing assistance vouchers and Supportive services for the most vulnerable chronically homeless veterans.
- Creation of a triage tool to standardize targeting at the VA drop in center and allow daily access to VASH and Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program assistance.
- By utilizing a single coordinated access system across the CoC to connect homeless veterans regardless of where they enter or present in the system.



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In addition to its VASH vouchers, HHA's role was critical in three ways:

- HHA provided critical leadership in multiple ways, including visionary leadership from Tory Gunsolley, President & CEO, and operational leadership from Mark Thiele, Vice President of the Housing Choice Voucher Program, who chaired *Housing Houston's Heroes* from inception;
- HHA's Jessica Preheim, Senior Program Manager for Homeless and Housing Initiatives, worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the system. This innovative position was created specifically for this initiative; and
- Using its Neighborhood Resource Center, HHA provided a central location for mass briefings and regular meetings with its partners.

"These brave men and women served our country, and now their lives are at risk on the same streets that thousands of us drive by every day," said Houston Housing Authority President & CEO Tory Gunsolley. "We cut through all the red tape and brought together all of the resources available from all of the numerous partners to help these veterans find safe, affordable homes and a fresh start. We are committed to ending homelessness in Houston and are thankful to work with great community partners who share our vision."

"We have accomplished together what we would not have been able to do alone," Mark Thiele, HHA's Vice President of the Housing Choice Voucher Program said. "Our veterans did their duty. It is our duty to house our homeless Houstonians and provide them with the supportive services they need."

Organizations participating in Housing Houston's Heroes include the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the City of Houston's Office of Veteran Affairs, the City of Houston Department of Housing and Community Development, the Houston Housing Authority, Harris County Housing Authority, Harris County Community Services Department, The Coalition for the Homeless, SEARCH Homeless Services, the Housing Corporation, the Salvation Army, Career and Recovery Resources, Inc., Catholic Charities, Goodwill Industries, Neighborhood Centers, Inc., US Vets, Cloudbreak Communities, Healthcare for the Homeless, Mental Health and Mental Retardation Authority, the Houston Police Department and the Houston Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County, and many more.

ABOUT HHA:

The Houston Housing Authority provides affordable homes and services to more than 60,000 low-income Houstonians, including over 17,000 families housed through the Housing Choice Voucher Program and another 5,500 living in 25 public housing and tax credit developments around the city. HHA also administers the nation's third largest voucher program exclusively serving homeless veterans. More information about HHA can be found at www.housingforhouston.com.

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