



## PHA GUIDE TO USING SPECIAL PURPOSE VOUCHERS TO END HOMELESSNESS

### Background

Since 2008, the vast majority of new Federal funds for housing vouchers have been allocated via Special purpose vouchers including [HUD's Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing](#) (HUD-VASH) program, the [Family Unification Program](#) (FUP), and [non-elderly disabled](#) (NED) vouchers. Funding for FUP and NED vouchers is allocated through a competitive process. For HUD-VASH, HUD and VA have awarded HUD-VASH vouchers based on geographic need and public housing agency (PHA) administrative performance every year since 2008.

The allocation process for HUD-VASH vouchers is a collaborative approach that relies on three sets of data: HUD's point-in-time data submitted by Continuums of Care (CoCs), VAMC data on the number of contacts with homeless Veterans, and performance data from PHAs and VAMCs. After determining which areas of the country have the highest number of homeless Veterans, the VA Central Office identifies VA facilities in the corresponding communities. HUD then selects PHAs near to the identified VA facilities, taking into consideration the PHAs' administrative performance, and sends the PHAs invitations to apply for the vouchers. Not all PHAs administer these programs.

Many PHAs utilize special purpose vouchers to address the needs of people in their community who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness. Although each special purpose voucher program carries its own program rules and considerations for program design, all of the programs (except for a subset [Category 1] of NED vouchers) require partnering with other government agencies. In the case of HUD-VASH it is VA, for FUP it is public child welfare agencies, and for NED Category 2, it is the state Medicaid or health agency or the state Money Follows the Person Demonstration agency.

Strong partnerships are essential to successfully implementing these programs, and improving the effectiveness and outcome in reducing homelessness. PHAs are more likely to be able to qualify for an allocation of special purpose vouchers and to implement these programs effectively if they have the capacity to partner with other systems and/or community-based organizations to link housing and services.

## Eligibility

Special purpose vouchers are different from regular Housing Choice Vouchers in that they have been specifically provided by Congress in separate appropriations and are reserved for specific populations.

- Only Veterans experiencing homelessness are eligible for HUD-VASH vouchers.
- FUP vouchers are for families in need of rental assistance to either prevent or end an out-of-home placement for one or more children, or for youth at least 18 years old and not more than 21 years old who left foster care at age 16 or older and who lack adequate housing.
- NED Vouchers are for non-elderly persons or families with disabilities, with a subset of vouchers (Category 2) reserved for people exiting nursing homes or other long-term care institutions.

The success of implementing special purpose vouchers relies on developing strong partnerships with other agencies to pair rental assistance with services.

In addition to these special purpose vouchers, in many communities PHAs have been involved in administering rental assistance for homeless people with disabilities, using funding that was previously awarded through HUD's [Shelter Plus Care](#) (S+C) program and now under the Continuum of Care (CoC) Program. PHAs that have been administering rental assistance on behalf of a CoC are usually part of ongoing collaborations with nonprofit organizations that pay for and deliver supportive services for homeless people and people with special needs.

Collaborative partnerships, policies, and procedures that have been established to administer this rental assistance often provide PHAs with the experience and relationships that can be expanded or adapted as they implement other specialized housing programs.

## Implementation Tips

- Because recipients of these special purpose vouchers are likely to be highly vulnerable people, PHAs may want to consider:
  - requesting the partnering agency's assistance in helping the family navigate the housing process, and/or partnering with community groups to help do so; implementing other strategies to help [speed up the lease-up process](#);
  - and providing reasonable accommodations to ensure these voucher recipients with disabilities are not screened-out of benefiting [from the voucher](#).
- Some special purpose vouchers are allocated to PHAs based on factors that include demonstrated need and capacity to administer voucher assistance. PHAs may be more likely to receive special purpose vouchers if they strengthen the administration of existing voucher programs and work with representatives of other agencies (such as the VA or child welfare agencies) to document the level of need and to develop partnership agreements to link housing assistance with referral and supportive services networks.
- A state child welfare agency and/or intermediary organization may be able to assist local PHAs by providing a template or model for partnership agreements that can be adapted to reflect the capacity and specific responsibilities of local partners.

The USICH Solutions database contains several profiles that describe how PHAs are using special purpose vouchers to implement promising programs that are working to end homelessness. Some examples including the [Huntington, W.Va., HUD-VASH Program](#) and [Washington, DC's VASH-Plus Program](#).

### Suggested for:

- PHAs with experience with programs such as Shelter Plus Care that have linked tenant-based housing assistance with support services and referral networks.
- PHAs in communities that have established goals related to ending and preventing homelessness for veterans, families involved in the child welfare system, and youth transitioning out of foster care.

### Additional Resources

- [HUD-VASH Best Practices – Version 1.0 A Working Document](#)
- [Promising Strategies for FUP Administrators](#)
- The Corporation for Supportive Housing has created an [on-line PHA Toolkit](#) that contains information and examples of PHAs that have used special purpose vouchers to provide housing linked to support services for persons experiencing homelessness.
- The Technical Assistance Collaborative website provides [a database of PHAs](#) that have received special purpose vouchers targeted to people with special needs.

#### Example

**The State of Washington, the State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Children's Administration (CA)** developed a template Memorandum of Understanding to be used by local PHAs, community partner agencies, and regional DSHS CA offices to apply for and implement FUP voucher programs. The template MOU describes roles and responsibilities for each partner agency. After FUP funding was awarded, the MOU was used as a training tool for staff and a reminder for partner agencies about agreements that had been made during the application process, and as a tool for ensuring that participants receive resources that are needed to ensure the program is a success. Since 2008, FUP vouchers have been awarded to seven PHAs in the state of Washington, including King County, Seattle, Clallam County, and Snohomish County.