



The Experiences and Perspectives of Veterans Participating in the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP)

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Capturing the voices of veterans experiencing homelessness can provide a unique perspective on the strengths and potential areas for improvement in the programs that seek to help them achieve stable housing and civilian employment. As part of the implementation study component of the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) evaluation (Box 1), the study team interviewed 54 current and former HVRP participants who were served by one of eight HVRP grantees. This brief describes the experiences of these veterans in HVRP, the services they most appreciated, and gaps they perceived in the services.¹ It describes veterans' pathways to HVRP and their perceptions about the accessibility and responsiveness of HVRP grant staff, the helpfulness of the services, and how they were treated (such as whether they were treated respectfully). It concludes with their suggestions for improving HVRP. The names of all veterans mentioned in this brief have been changed for confidentiality.

Veterans' pathways from military service to homelessness and HVRP

On a single night in January 2020, more than 37,000 veterans experienced homelessness, which is defined as sleeping outside, residing in an emergency shelter, or living in a transitional housing program (Henry et al. 2021). Risk factors for veteran homelessness synthesized from previous literature include unemployment and low income, in addition to other factors such as service-related disabilities, mental health challenges, or substance use issues (Balshem et al. 2011; Tsai and Rosenheck 2015). All the veterans interviewed for this brief had experienced—or were currently experiencing—homelessness when the study team spoke with them. Their stories illuminate the circumstances that led them to experience homelessness.²

Military service. Forty-three of the 54 veterans shared the branch of the military in which they served. Of those 43 veterans, 19 served in the United States Army, 8 in the Navy, 6 in the Air Force, and 6 in the Marines. Three veterans served in the Army National Guard and one each in the Air National Guard,

¹ The research method used had several limitations. First, the findings presented in this brief are limited in their generalizability to a broader set of HVRP veterans or to other contexts. The study team can only report what was described by the veterans who were interviewed from the eight grantees selected for the implementation study. Second, these veterans were recruited in partnership with the grantee agencies, which could bias the findings. Third, the veteran interviews started in December 2020, nine months after the March 2020 start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and ended in September 2021; this timing affected the context of the findings.

² The study team did not receive demographic data on veterans interviewed from the grantees, but veterans described their experiences in the military and their career and housing histories. The study team spoke with veterans of different ages, who had diverse military backgrounds (for example, branch of service, duration of service, types of jobs held in service), professional experience, and life circumstances. All veterans were connected with HVRP services and had an existing relationship with the grantee when they were interviewed.

Box 1. About the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) Evaluation

Authorized by the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act in 1987, the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) is the only federally funded program focused exclusively on providing employment services to veterans experiencing homelessness. HVRP grantees can be state, local, or tribal governments; local workforce investment boards; or profit or non-profits organizations. They receive three-year grants, although the second and third years of the grant are awarded based on performance and available funds. In program year 2020, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) awarded 157 HVRP grants (U.S. Department of Labor 2020b).

This issue brief is one in a series of briefs that present findings from the HVRP Evaluation, which is being conducted for DOL's Chief Evaluation Office (CEO), in collaboration with DOL's Veterans' Employment and Training Service. To assess HVRP's impact on employment outcomes, the evaluation consists of two studies: (1) a quasi-experimental impact study using administrative data and (2) a complementary implementation study.

The implementation study, which provided data for this brief, included two data collection activities: (1) a survey of all grantees from program year 2020 and (2) site visits to eight HVRP grantee communities that were deliberately selected to inform the impact study. The survey was administered from October 2020 to January 2021 and 147 grantees (94 percent) took part. The site visit communities were limited to those where the HVRP grantee operated in a state participating in the impact study and had listed an American Job Center as a partner agency in their grant application. Site visit grantees were selected to reflect geographic and urban-rural diversity. The site visits, which were conducted virtually from November 2020 through September 2021, included key informant interviews with grantee staff and their program partners reflecting housing, employment, and health sectors, as well as in-depth interviews with 54 veterans who received services from one of the eight selected grantees (Batko et al. 2022). The study team spoke with five to eight veterans served by each grantee.

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Coast Guard, and the military police. Of the 40 who reported their years of military service, the years served ranged from 1977 to 2021, with an average service period of just under five years.

Employment experience prior to HVRP participation. All veterans interviewed said they had experienced unemployment, underemployment, or loss of other income in their civilian life before participating in HVRP, but most did not experience income instability immediately after military service:

- Forty-one veterans worked across several professional fields after exiting the military and described stable financial and housing circumstances while they were employed (see Box 2).
- Seven veterans described exiting the military into long-term employment in one professional field, before losing their job and experiencing financial and housing instability. Two of these veterans mentioned that the skills they developed during their time in the military, including welding and administrative work, translated to their civilian employment using these skills.
- Six veterans interviewed began experiencing homelessness immediately after leaving the military and described periods of intermittent employment. One of these veterans described experiencing homelessness both before and after serving in the military.

Veterans described a number of factors that contributed to their unemployment, including destabilizing events and conditions in their personal lives. Although not all of the veterans shared details about these destabilizing events, those who did described being laid off due to company cutbacks (three veterans), hostile working environments (two veterans), and events or situations at work that amplified the effects of their post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (two veterans). Personal factors included moving for the purpose of finding work or taking care of family (seven veterans), being evicted (two veterans), and

dealing with parenting and child care challenges (three veterans). Other challenges that contributed to their unemployment included age and physical health (five veterans) and mental health challenges experienced after serving in the military (four veterans).



Box 2. Jordan's work experience after the military

Jordan is an example of a veteran who was employed in multiple fields after leaving the military and then experienced a personal challenge that created barriers to employment and risk factors for homelessness.

Jordan enlisted in the Army before he graduated from high school. During that period, Jordan felt "directionless" and saw the military as his best option for housing and personal stability. After his service, Jordan again felt directionless. "I was freaking lost," he explained. "When I got out, same deal, I had no direction, I had no idea what I want[ed] to do."

Eventually, Jordan found a position as a chef in a local restaurant and discovered he had a knack for cooking. For a while, he bounced around jobs in restaurants. His challenge was keeping a job. He explained that often his anxiety would escalate, and he would be unable to stay in a job for the long term. "I don't really have any physical challenges, just mental challenges," Jordan said. "Some nights, [I] wake up in cold sweats and flashback to my military days. That's basically my challenge." Eventually, he found construction work. But, due to what he described as challenges in his personal life, Jordan ended up in jail, and he did not have viable employment or housing options after he was released from incarceration.

Participation in housing programs. Housing supports for veterans may be offered through programs run by the same grantee agency that operates HVRP, or by external HVRP partners. Of the 54 veterans interviewed, 17 were referred to housing programs offered by the grantee agency that also operated HVRP (for example, the Supportive Services for Veteran Families program or the Grant and Per Diem (GPD) program [Box 3]). These veterans reported enrolling in HVRP after receiving housing. Of the 54 veterans interviewed, 15 reported receiving their permanent supportive housing through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program. When asked about their housing satisfaction, one veteran enrolled in HUD-VASH stated, "Sometimes I can't tell people how happy I am because I don't [want to] lose it, but hey, I'm living like a king up in this camp, and I'm very thankful."

Nine veterans received transitional housing while enrolled in HVRP, either through the grantee agency or through a referral to a housing partner. Seven of these veterans did not specify where they were co-enrolled; however, two of these veterans said their housing was associated with enrollment in the GPD program.



Box 3. Key housing supports for veterans experiencing homelessness

- 1. Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF)** is primarily a short-term, rapid-response housing program that focuses on homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing assistance. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) administers SSVF through a competitive funding process.
 - 2. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program** is a collaboration between the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the VA. It combines housing vouchers with VA supportive services to help veterans and their families find and sustain permanent housing. HUD-VASH vouchers are allocated to jurisdictions based on a formula.
 - 3. The Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Program** provides transitional housing and services until a veteran can find permanent housing. The VA administers GPD through a competitive grant funding process.
- Source: VA Homeless Programs. Available at <https://www.va.gov/homeless/gpd.asp> and <https://www.va.gov/homeless/hud-vash.asp>; Supportive Services for Veteran Families. Available at <https://www.va.gov/homeless/ssvf/ssvf-overview/>.

Veterans' experiences with HVRP programming

The HVRP model involves five critical stages: (1) outreach and referral, (2) eligibility determination and enrollment, (3) case management, (4) employment services, and (5) program exit (Figure 1) (Batko et al. 2022). Interviewed veterans described their experiences at each of these stages.

Figure 1. HVRP participants' progression through services



Source: Authors' synthesis based on a review of relevant documents. Batko et al. (2022).

HVRP = Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program.

Referral to and enrollment in HVRP

Veterans interviewed described how they learned about HVRP and the process for enrolling in the program.

Thirty-one veterans described their referral to HVRP as a “warm handoff,” that is, where the referring agency made a connection to the HVRP grantee on behalf of the participant. Direct referral from a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) representative or case manager was most common (22 veterans). The next most frequently reported referral pathway was through a community housing partner, such as a shelter or housing program (17 veterans); sometimes this housing program was operated by the HVRP grantee (see Box 4). Some veterans who were not referred to HVRP by another program heard about it from another veteran or family member (six veterans). Two veterans described finding HVRP through their own research, such as through the Internet or attending a veteran-targeted event, and one veteran learned of HVRP after calling 211 for assistance.

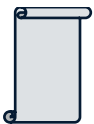


Box 4. Stephen's path to HVRP

Stephen was driving for a ridesharing company while taking care of his aging parent before he fell on hard times. When Stephen lost his car, he was without a job and spent the rest of his savings on caring for his parent. When he lost his housing, he reached out to a local homelessness services provider that referred him to the Grant and Per Diem (GPD) program. The agency operating GPD also had an HVRP grant. After enrolling in GPD and settling in transitional housing, Stephen was referred to the HVRP staff at the agency. When Stephen met with the HVRP staff, he did not know what to expect and was “apprehensive about the whole thing,” but he was open to any employment options. “It was intimidating, because, at the time, you're feeling down about yourself. You don't feel anything good could happen,” said Stephen. However, the HVRP staff helped boost his confidence. “You've got all these people rooting for you, so it builds you up a little bit. So, you do have the guts to get up and try again in the morning,” he said.

After being referred to HVRP, veterans generally described the same engagement and enrollment process, as described below:

- **Meeting an HVRP staff person to learn about the program.** One veteran described this step as “setting expectations” for HVRP services and participation. HVRP case managers provided an overview of the program, including available services.
- **Completing paperwork and providing documentation for eligibility.** All veterans reported that HVRP case managers collected specific documentation, including identification and the Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty, known as a DD214 form. (See Box 5 for information on how the COVID-19 pandemic created challenges to obtaining identification for enrollment and employment for six veterans.) Eight veterans from one grantee described completing this paperwork before scheduling the introductory meeting described above.
- **Participating in an assessment.** Six of the veterans reported that HVRP case managers conducted an initial assessment to determine their employment and supportive services needs. Assessment questions covered employment history, skills and qualifications, housing history, and current living situation.



Box 5. COVID-19 pandemic and barriers to documentation

When applying to jobs or enrolling in HVRP, six veterans who attempted to access documentation since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic described delays and a backlog of requests at government administrative offices. For example, two veterans from one grantee explained that the local Department of Motor Vehicles was closed for a period during the pandemic, leading to a backlog of document requests and a waiting period of more than six months to renew their licenses. Another veteran described a similar wait time at the local VA to access their DD214 form for enrollment. Three veterans who faced challenges accessing required documentation noted that HVRP staff helped them obtain documents and worked to troubleshoot their delays.

Despite having navigated the enrollment process, many interviewed veterans reported a mixed understanding of HVRP eligibility requirements. The veterans interviewed generally understood that participants must be veterans and homeless to enroll (17 veterans explicitly noted these eligibility requirements). Five veterans mentioned the requirement of an honorable discharge status on their DD214 form. However, 10 of the interviewed veterans (about 20 percent) did not fully understand eligibility and described the program as being for all veterans or all people experiencing housing instability.

Six veterans expressed worry that they would not be eligible at the time of enrollment. Reasons they thought they might not be eligible included receiving disability benefits that exceeded perceived limits, not having experienced unsheltered homelessness, having a dishonorable discharge, not having access to their DD214 form, or having expired legal identification. Two veterans said HVRP staff took steps to help the veterans get their documents ready and upgrade their discharge status to enroll in HVRP.

Generally, veterans thought HVRP staff and the intake process were helpful and that the assessment accurately captured their needs. Three veterans specifically identified the assessment as a time when they felt cared for, understood, and respected by HVRP staff. Only two veterans suggested that the assessment could have been more in depth and more focused on their skill set or other mental and behavioral health considerations.

Case management and employment services

HVRP case managers were responsible for assisting veterans in obtaining employment and accessing services that will help them successfully reenter the workforce (U.S. Department of Labor 2020a). This section discusses veterans' experiences with case management and employment services.

All veterans noted regularly communicating with HVRP staff. Forty-four of the interviewed veterans reported meeting with their case managers for scheduled meetings at regular intervals (for example, every other day, weekly, or biweekly). Veterans' accounts of their experiences with HVRP staff indicated that staff reached out to veterans depending on individual needs. Ten veterans said communication tapered as they advanced in their job search or found a job; these veterans shared that communication often started with check-ins at least once a week, and then shifted to biweekly and sometimes monthly. Employed veterans reflected that their communication with HVRP staff consisted mostly of check-ins once a month or every few months.

Across all grantees, veterans' communication with HVRP staff was a mix of in-person visits, phone calls, texts, and emails. Phone calls and in-person visits were the primary means of communication that veterans described. The veterans who enrolled in HVRP before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic noted that the pandemic shifted communication to mostly virtual, although veterans from four grantees reported that providers opened their offices for socially distanced in-person visits. Twenty veterans said they received texts and emails from staff outside of scheduled meetings.

Thirteen veterans reported that HVRP staff focused on quickly securing them employment. These veterans described a very hands-on approach to employment services, where employment staff sent them daily updates, drove them to interviews, or filled out their applications. Other helpful supports included access to in-office resources, such as drop-in computer labs and printers. Three interviewed veterans did not have experience using employment websites before enrolling in HVRP and received assistance from staff in accessing online job boards and databases using the grantee's computer lab. Seven veterans searched for jobs on their own using the computer lab as a resource. Box 6 shares one veteran's experience with employment services.



Box 6. Anthony's employment opportunities through HVRP

Anthony's experience with his case manager, as well as his employment opportunities, reflected similar stories shared by interviewed veterans. At Anthony's second case management meeting, his case manager told him about a temporary job opportunity with a security company. Anthony jumped at the opportunity and began work that afternoon. His case manager went with him to purchase the necessary supplies, including work clothing and non-slip shoes. Although Anthony still envisioned himself as a truck driver, he was content with his current employment as a security guard. "It's good money," he said. "And for now, I will absolutely remain a security guard for this company into the foreseeable future, absolutely." At the time of the interview, Anthony was working with his case manager to enroll in a commercial driver's license course and found scholarships to help with the cost. He planned to make the switch to driving after saving more of his income.

Thirty-two veterans said HVRP grantees provided tangible resources to support job searches and employment activities. These resources included funding for transportation (20 veterans), work clothing or tools (17 veterans), job training and credentialing (12 veterans), and assistance obtaining necessary documents like driver's licenses and DD214 forms (5 veterans). Six veterans considered funded resources the most practical and helpful aspect of HVRP. Accreditation and training programs that veterans pursued through HVRP included commercial driver's license, forklift operator, and security officer trainings.

Three veterans also said they talked to their case managers to persuade them to fund their chosen program, such as medical certifications, culinary training, and information and technology training.

Twenty-two veterans expressed trust and respect in their working relationship with HVRP staff.

Five veterans consistently described staff as going “above and beyond.” They emphasized valuing their relationships with staff as a source of personal support and encouragement. One veteran summarized the role of HVRP case management staff in their life as, “just knowing that if I had a situation, either financially, or emotionally, that I could go to them and they would either be able to help me directly or find the resources that I need.” Key components of this relationship were reported to include staff consistency achieved through regular meetings and follow-through on commitments made to veterans, having a person to fall back on, and staff outreach. Fifteen veterans reported that case managers provided encouragement and confidence in navigating job market and employment readiness, and five veterans specifically mentioned increased self-confidence in entering and navigating jobs.



“In order to start working, I needed some tools right away. And I didn’t have the finance[s] to buy them, and if it wasn’t for this program, I don’t think I would have had this job right now.”

– Veteran enrolled in HVRP



“The positivity, accessibility, I think, I know that if I run [into] a question, I have someone to call. If I had doubts, if I do something stupid, and actually quit a job, which has happened, I can go back to them, and they don’t judge.”

– Veteran enrolled in HVRP

Seven of the 54 veterans interviewed described having multiple case managers for HVRP or noticing staff turnover at the HVRP grantee. Although these seven veterans did not explicitly describe this as a problem with the program, one veteran noted frustration: “Even after I got a job, she thought she was going to work with me for up to a year. So, I thought I was building the relationship with her, and then all of a sudden, just overnight, she was gone. That was a little awkward. I mean, it was okay. It really threw me off at first.... It was just abrupt.”

Program exit

Eight veterans had exited HVRP services at the time of their interview. These veterans reported initiating their own exit, usually after what could be described as a step-down in service use and communication between the veteran and HVRP staff. Veterans described reasons for leaving the program that included becoming employed, no longer needing services, falling out of touch with their case manager or deciding not to pursue services after initial contact, and moving to a different location. Two veterans explained that the COVID-19 pandemic made maintaining communication too difficult to sustain services. Two veterans mentioned no longer pursuing employment services because they were ready to retire.

Veteran-identified benefits to HVRP enrollment

The veterans interviewed believed HVRP’s primary benefit was the access it provided to employment opportunities. Eleven veterans also described the value of the relationship with HVRP staff as a key benefit, independent of any other gains that case management might bring them.

Of the 54 interviewed veterans, 21 were employed at the time of the interview and 5 were looking for work;³ 15 of the 21 employed participants said they got their job through HVRP. The 15 veterans who got their job through HVRP reported a range of part-time and full-time work, ranging from 15 to 40 hours per week. Eight of these veterans reported that HVRP staff had connections with employers offering jobs where they could be rapidly placed, including janitorial, maintenance, mail room, security, warehouse forklift operations, and food service positions. They described an expedited interview and hiring process; as one veteran stated, “All I needed to do was show up.” The following are specific examples of these connections:

- Five of the eight veterans mentioned above were from one grantee and they described being connected immediately to security positions because their case manager had an established connection with two local security companies.
- Two veterans participating with another grantee described finding employment in nearby warehouses through HVRP staff connections.

A notable benefit, mentioned by 19 interviewed veterans, was a sense of caring and understanding that veterans felt when they worked with HVRP staff. Of those veterans, 11 shared that they were grateful for the relationships they built with staff through HVRP or mentioned increased self-confidence. Across the 54 interviewed veterans, 20 said they valued the working relationships they had with their case managers, and 15 said their case managers provided encouragement and confidence in navigating job market and employment readiness, helping make the process more approachable.

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“So, what I got out of it [was] genuine authenticity in terms of someone putting a hand out and be willing to pick me up in a dark spot... they always give me encouragement every time I see them. They say, ‘We’re proud of you. You’re being the hero that you want to be. We share the same values. You’re a superstar. You’re going to be successful and we’re going to help you be successful.’ That’s bigger than the statistics. That’s what I have to say is the highest... priority in terms of what value do I gain from it.”

– Veteran enrolled in HVRP

Veteran-identified challenges in HVRP programming

In addition to describing their experiences with HVRP, veterans shared challenges they faced in the program, including (1) finding appropriate job placements, (2) challenging work environments, and (3) ongoing barriers to employment.

Thirteen veterans expressed a tension between their case managers’ focus on quick-hire job placements versus finding the best fit for a veteran’s background and experience. Thirteen of the 15 veterans who said that they found their current job through HVRP shared frustration about not finding a job that matched their professional background and qualifications. Seven veterans mentioned that they accepted temporary job placements—focusing on attaining employment over finding the best fit—with the goal of

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“Yes, I’m grateful. Is it my first choice? No. But I’m sticking with it for the time being.”

– Veteran reflecting on the first job they accessed through HVRP services

³ The other 28 interviewed veterans included new HVRP participants who had not yet coordinated their job search with their case manager, others waiting to participate in training, and older participants who were deciding whether they wanted to pursue employment.

revisiting their employment plan for a better, second job. Five veterans said they felt that the staff were focused on minimizing their period of unemployment, and therefore suggested jobs with immediate availability rather than finding the “right” fit for the veteran.

Ten veterans described challenging work environments. Of the 15 veterans who found their current employment through HVRP services, 10 reported getting a job that did not typically follow a 9-to-5 work schedule. For example, four veterans mentioned early morning start times or long shifts. These positions included long-haul commercial driving, warehouse and manufacturing jobs, and food service jobs. Additionally, five veterans described challenging work conditions, including physically demanding manual labor or long work hours. Three of these veterans were served by one grantee; they were employed in warehouses and described difficult, labor-intensive work.



“It’s demoralizing because it’s like I’m almost treated like I’m not good enough. There’s no part of me in this world that is lazy...I just physically am killing myself. It’s a 10-hour shift, and it’s heavy lifting the whole day.”

– Veteran reflecting on a manufacturing job acquired through HVRP services

Twenty-four veterans shared that they experienced ongoing barriers to securing and maintaining employment, such as health challenges and limited access to transportation. Veterans described a number of physical and mental health challenges, including the following:

- Physical health and age (nine veterans).
- Mental health challenges—including depression, paranoia, and anxiety—that precluded them from regularly attending work (eight veterans).
- Events or situations at their work that amplified the effects of their PTSD (three veterans).

Four veterans who found a job with HVRP assistance said they still faced transportation challenges to keep their job. For example, two veterans specifically noted that jobs were too far away from their housing. Another veteran explained that his job had irregular hours and started before the public transit hours of operation, making it difficult to find affordable transportation without a car.

Additionally, five veterans shared that the COVID-19 pandemic was a barrier to their employment search, due to both limited job availability in their area and concern for their health and safety.

Veteran-identified opportunities for improving HVRP programming

Thirty of the 54 veterans interviewed shared suggestions for improving the HVRP. These suggestions fell into three broad categories: (1) case management services and job placement, (2) additional services and resources, and (3) opportunities for earlier intervention and expanding capacity.

Case management services and job placement

Of the 54 veterans interviewed, 12 veterans across six grantees provided suggestions for improving case management services.

Six veterans said that case managers should provide more tailored services and job placement recommendations. One veteran shared his perception that “[the HVRP staff] just try to get you employed, basically. I’m not too sure if they try to get you the right job as opposed to any job.” Four of these veterans expanded on this sentiment and shared that job opportunities were not tailored to veterans’

skills. All four felt that more dedicated one-on-one time with veterans to understand their skills and education and build deeper relationships would help case managers better tailor the program and job offerings to veterans' needs and skills. One of these veterans shared that, if HVRP grantees "were able to interface with [veterans] more and ... know their needs and...know...[what] their strengths and their weaknesses are..., [then they] would get them on their feet quicker."

Two veterans suggested specific ways that case managers could improve the intake process to better serve participants. One veteran felt that the assessment questions as part of the HVRP enrollment process were too vague to identify participants' specific skills and what participants needed to be successful: "If you want to help somebody and find out what they need and if they're eligible, I don't think that they were the right questions asked.... They were vague. If I were to help vet[eran]s now, I'm going to give more skills specific [questions] about why and what needs help to work." Another veteran shared that he was not directly asked about potential barriers during his intake meeting that might affect his ability to work certain jobs, including challenges with social anxiety and substance use: "But I think maybe if they knew [about additional barriers], if they actually questioned many things, it would be better equipped to place you." This veteran believed HVRP case managers should focus more on barriers that could affect employment, and that this focus should be standardized across the program.

Two veterans also suggested improving the location of HVRP case management services, either in a private space for case counseling or by co-locating case managers at housing locations. One veteran shared that his case manager's office was in the career center and that he was not comfortable meeting in public spaces. One veteran shared that many participants did not have access to transportation and would often have to walk to the HVRP office. The veteran suggested that having HVRP staff on site at housing locations could enable participants to spend more time with their case managers working on employment services.

Two veterans recommended improved communication processes. Both of these veterans expressed challenges reaching HVRP staff by phone and felt that increasing availability by phone would be helpful. One of the veterans suggested that HVRP develop a brochure or program materials that clearly state what the program does and does not offer. The two veterans thought that clearer program documentation would help veterans know whom to contact and how, and the additional clarity could reduce the chance of veterans dropping out of the program or never enrolling.

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"I mean the brochure should...[in] the three main counties...have contact numbers for the [HVRP] people in those counties. It should identify what the program can and can't offer, just even on an overview kind of thing, whether temporary housing is available, then give some idea of what costs are, the costs, timing.... I received none of that information...and then trying to get those questions answered was like knocking my head against the wall."

– Veteran enrolled in HVRP

Additional services and resources

Nine veterans from six grantees suggested additional employment services and resources that could help them become more successful in their job search and reaching financial stability.

Five veterans suggested that grantees could offer additional job trainings to help veterans develop new skills and better prepare for the workforce. Specific suggestions included training in specialized skills (for example, welding, commercial landscaping, carpentry), computer classes, and life skills classes (for example, financial management, budgeting, developing interpersonal relationships) that would help veterans secure and sustain their employment. One veteran said that providing veterans with additional

training to develop special skills might help them reengage and boost their interest in entering the job market.

Four veterans suggested other needed supports like help sending out resumes, more job fairs, and more opportunities to meet or connect with employers. For example, one veteran shared that the services and training he was offered were not specialized or advanced enough for his needs; he felt that HVRP staff should develop resources to serve veterans who need more than basic supports. Another veteran suggested a job search engine that would allow case managers and veterans to connect with employers in their area looking to fill specific positions.⁴

Seven veterans expressed a need for non-employment services in their community, which they felt the HVRP grantee could fill. These reported services included help addressing legal challenges, supports with mental or physical health challenges, financial assistance with necessities (for example, food, clothing, laundry), and support advocating for and coordinating with other services agencies like HUD or disabilities services. Although these services may be beyond the scope of the HVRP, these suggestions might point to service gaps in the community or an opportunity for HVRP case managers to connect veterans to additional services that program partners or other community organizations could provide.

Opportunities for earlier intervention and expanding capacity

In addition to specific programmatic suggestions, nine veterans from four grantees identified ways that HVRP grantees, and the veteran services field more broadly, could serve veterans earlier and expand the scope and capacity of the program.

Four veterans shared that more proactive outreach and information sharing would ensure that veterans engaged in the program before—or soon after—they began to experience homelessness. As one veteran shared, “I wish it was broadcast for the veterans because there’s a lot of veterans [who are] even worse than I am.... I don’t think [the grantee] put themselves out there are enough for veterans to know unless someone tells you, and you got to be seeking that.” Specific suggestions included developing stronger relationships and outreach plans with partners such as the VA and more proactively sharing information about the program directly with participants (for example, using flyers and park bench ads rather than relying solely on a website).

Five veterans shared ways that they thought the HVRP could expand its scope. Three veterans believed the HVRP would benefit from additional funding, which could be used to expand the program to provide more services or to serve more veterans. One veteran suggested that the program could expand its scope to provide more services for veterans transitioning back to civilian life, before they experienced homelessness or housing instability.⁵ Another veteran shared that, although HVRP was an investment in veterans and in finding them employment, he thought the program could be an opportunity to increase veterans’ access to more federal jobs if they qualified.

⁴ Although American Job Centers (AJCs) typically provide this service, the veteran did not mention receiving services from the AJC.

⁵ Although not mentioned by interviewed participants, all military personnel separating from the military participate in the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) to prepare them for civilian life and work in the civilian labor market. TAP is an effort of multiple federal agencies, including the Departments of Defense, Education, Homeland Security, Labor, and Veterans Affairs.

Conclusion

Overall, interviewed veterans found value in the services provided by HVRP and the relationships they built with HVRP staff. Throughout veterans' progression through the program, they found program staff accessible, empathetic, and respectful. Interviewed veterans described the tangible services HVRP staff provided as helpful and needed. Commonly referenced tangible supports included connections to employment opportunities, transportation assistance, and work clothes and tools. Interviewed veterans who gained employment through HVRP services were grateful for their employment opportunities but noted that the jobs did not always match their work experience, expertise, or career goals. Additionally, the veterans continued to face barriers to employment, including difficulty acquiring training and education and struggling with physical and mental health challenges. Interviewed veterans' suggestions to improve HVRP included tailoring job opportunities and services more to veterans' unique career experience and goals and identifying areas where veterans need additional support.

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