

Elks Launch Welcome Home Program to Serve Homeless Veterans!

The Elks have joined forces with the Department of Veterans Affairs to help end veteran homelessness.

The Elks National Veterans Service Commission has pledged four million dollars in support over the next four years to ensure the success of this initiative. Along with pledging funds, the Elks National Veterans Service Commission is enlisting the help of their 800,000 members in all 50 states. Together, we can provide the tools and support necessary for homeless veterans to transition successfully into healthier and more stable lives.

"We're so excited about partnering with the Elks on this important issue facing the lives of so many Veterans," said Department of Veterans Affairs' Secretary Bob McDonald. "As we move closer to the end of the year, partnerships like these will be critical to ensuring that all Veterans have access to safe and affordable housing."

The program will launch this winter at three facilities in the Chicago area; Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital in Hines, Ill.; Jesse Brown VA Medical Center in Chicago, Ill.; and Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center in North Chicago, Ill.

Specifically, the Elks will assist the VA with 8 targeted objectives, all aimed at helping veterans find safe, stable homes.

1. The Elks will facilitate a national public awareness campaign ... that will touch thousands of communities.

- View this video. Share it with your friends and family. Talk to your neighbors and local officials about the issue of veteran homelessness and how you'd like to help end it in your community.

2. The Elks will promote the Housing Navigator model to all of its Lodges and encourage them to participate in this effort in all communities they serve.

- [Contact your local VA](#) and ask how you can help. The VA is not allowed to solicit donations, so they depend on people like you to offer help. If you have time to give, register as an official VA volunteer. Transitioning veterans can always use a hand establishing a home and building a support system in the community.

3. The Elks will motivate each of its Lodges to facilitate at least one event and/or partner with coalition members within the next year to assist in the coordination of ending veteran homelessness.

- The Elks will work with each of their Lodges to spread the word about this issue, and hold at least one event a year to address it. So many of our Lodges are already working hard to support homeless veterans by participating in local Stand Downs, cooking meals at transitional shelters, holding support groups, donating supplies, running veterans' resource centers and more.

4. The Elks will take on the mission of ending veteran homelessness in three pilot cities in phase one: Chicago, New York and D.C./Alexandria.

- We've already met with dedicated and inspiring partners in the Chicago area, and are ready to launch the program here any day now! If you live in one of these three areas and want to help, please email Vets@elks.org or call 773-755-4736.

5. The Elks will lead and coordinate community entities and efforts to provide Welcome Home Kits to veterans who receive HUD-VASH vouchers in pilot cities.

- Most veterans move into their homes with nothing. Help veterans establish their homes by building a Welcome Home Kit. Generally, this kit would include some small furniture, kitchenware, and cleaning supplies. Items can be new or used, donated or purchased. [Click here](#) for a suggested list of Welcome Home Kit supplies.

6. The Elks will work with coalition partners in pilot cities to provide rapid rehousing assistance (first/last month's rent, utilities, co-signing home loans) for veterans who are homeless or at risk of being homeless.

- Preventing homelessness is also priority, and often times a small amount of assistance at the right time can make a big difference. The Elks will partner with the VA to ensure that veterans in need of emergency assistance don't fall through the cracks and lose their housing.

7. The Elks will conduct housing fairs or participate in existing housing fairs hosted by VA facilities or other VA partners in the pilot cities, as well as encourage Lodges to encourage landlords to accept HUD-VASH vouchers and not discriminate against veterans.

- The Elks will help spread the word about the importance and the advantages of renting to veterans in need. Watch this video of First Lady Michelle Obama encouraging landlords to help end veteran homelessness and be sure to talk to your friends and neighbors who are landlords about the importance of this issue.

8. The Elks will be willing to assist in housing navigation process as deemed appropriate.

- The Elks will act as catch-all volunteers, ready to assist at the drop of the hat. Often times, this can be as simple as being a friend. It can be difficult to change habits and transition from a life on the street. We encourage Elks to set up a monthly visit or dinner at the Lodge, and call transitioning veterans a few times each month to check in. Welcome veterans home, and into the Elks family.