

Government housing voucher program effectively reduces homeless veteran population

September 10 2019, by Colleen Sharkey



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Homelessness is a persistent and significant public policy and public health challenge, disproportionately affecting veterans. However, the

fiscal year 2020 budget negotiated between President Donald Trump and Speaker Nancy Pelosi includes no growth in funding for the Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) voucher program.

These vouchers provide chronically homeless veterans with a permanent residence and supportive services to help get their lives back on track. Since 2008, almost 100,000 homeless veterans have benefited from these vouchers, and over this period the number of [homeless veterans](#) in the U.S. dropped by roughly 45 percent.

Research led by William Evans, co-founder of the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO) at the University of Notre Dame, confirms that for every HUD-VASH voucher distributed, one fewer veteran is living on the streets.

"There are few government programs with convincing evidence that the program is delivering as promised," said Evans, whose study conducted with other Notre Dame researchers was recently published in the *American Journal of Public Health*. "In contrast, HUD-VASH is working as intended at a very large scale. These [budget cuts](#) come at a critical time, as the number of post-9/11 veterans is expected to grow rapidly in the next few years. This group is particularly vulnerable to being homeless."

In late 2018, HUD Secretary Ben Carson specifically credited HUD-VASH vouchers, a program started during the Clinton administration and expanded under President George W. Bush, as one of the most effective tools in combating [veteran](#) homelessness. The HUD-VASH program is administered through nonprofits where [social workers](#) implement a holistic approach to tackling issues veterans face, including homelessness and lack of health care.

After Torrest Rice was honorably discharged from the Army, he bounced around from one living situation to another—first with his mom, then a stint in prison for a drug charge, then in the home of a girlfriend. When that relationship ended, Rice found himself with nowhere to go. His parents had died, and [knee injuries](#) he had sustained in Operation Desert Storm impacted his ability to forge ahead on his own.

Rice made his way to South Bend's Robert L. Miller Sr. Veteran's Center where he learned that he was eligible for a HUD-VASH voucher. Less than three months later, he was moving into his own apartment.

Without HUD-VASH, Rice said, "I would be in a terrible place. I know for a fact I would have relapsed or reverted back to what I was doing. I know I would have." He noted that, because he has stable housing through HUD-VASH, he was able to improve financially, mentally and physically. The support he received from case workers in the HUD-VASH program, he said, has helped him remain clean and sober and gainfully employed. He now works for the South Bend Housing Authority helping other veterans apply for the HUD-VASH program.

"Eliminating new HUD-VASH vouchers in 2020 would put more strain on our already overburdened emergency response and health systems and consign scores of veterans and their families to become permanent members of the nation's homeless," said Heather Reynolds, managing director of LEO. "We have to do better in serving these men and women who have done so much to serve us."

Provided by University of Notre Dame

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