

Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF)

Homelessness Prevention (HP) Screening Form (v.4 January 2019)

COMPANION GUIDE

The **SSVF Homelessness Prevention (HP) Screening Form** is designed to help staff assess, document, and determine whether a Veteran household applying for SSVF homelessness prevention assistance is:

- 1) Eligible for SSVF homelessness prevention assistance (i.e., “Stage 1”), and;
- 2) A priority for SSVF homelessness prevention assistance in the event there are not sufficient resources to assist all eligible Veterans (i.e., “Stage 2”).

This companion guide describes the two stages of screening required for all persons applying for SSVF homelessness prevention assistance (i.e., Category 1 of persons occupying permanent housing). Grantees are required to implement the newest version of the **SSVF Homelessness Prevention (HP) Screening Form** (version 4) within their grant program, no later than January 2019. The screening form must be completed by SSVF grantee staff for each applicant household, using information obtained from the Veteran head of household. Questions included on the form are intended to be a starting point for a discussion between program staff and the applicant household regarding program eligibility and targeting criteria for homelessness prevention assistance.

SCREENING FOR STAGE 1: VA SSVF HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for SSVF homelessness prevention assistance, a household must be screened for and meet each of the VA eligibility conditions described below.

Condition 1. Veteran Status: Applicant household must either be a Veteran or a member of a family in which the head of household, or the spouse of the head of household, is a Veteran. A Veteran is *defined* as “a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, regardless of length of service, and who was discharged or released there from. Veteran excludes a person who received a dishonorable discharge from the Armed Forces or was discharged or dismissed from the Armed Forces by reason of the sentence of a general court-martial. The length of service restrictions under 38 U.S.C. 5303A do not apply.”

Condition 2. Very Low-Income Status: Applicant household gross annual income must be not exceed 50% of area median income based on the income limits most recently published at: <http://www.huduser.org/portal/datasets/il.html>.

Condition 3. Imminently At-Risk of Literal Homelessness: Applicant household must (1) be imminently losing their primary nighttime residence, (2) have no other residence, and (3) not have sufficient resources or support networks (e.g., family, friends, faith-based or other social networks) immediately available to prevent them from becoming literally homeless.

Determining Imminent Risk: Apart from being a qualified Veteran with very low-income, applicants must also be imminently at-risk of literal homelessness. This means that every Veteran who meets Stage 1 eligibility will become literally homeless in 30 days or less “but for” SSVF assistance (i.e., an applicant has no other housing options and resources and there are no other community resources available to prevent literal homelessness). SSVF is not an eviction prevention program. It is intended to prevent Veterans and their families from losing all housing and ending up in emergency shelter or on the street. Some Veterans who apply for SSVF Homelessness Prevention assistance may be losing their housing, but they have another safe and appropriate housing option – including temporary options – where they can stay while they work to obtain their own housing. Or, an applicant may have another resource they can use to maintain current housing or obtain new housing. Such Veterans would not be considered at imminent risk of literal homelessness and would not be eligible for SSVF Homelessness Prevention assistance.

Sections 3A through 3C of the screening form include questions to determine whether a household is at imminent risk of literal homelessness within 30 days of applying for assistance and is, therefore, eligible for SSVF homelessness prevention services. Staff should use these questions as a starting point and ask additional questions to better understand an applicant’s current circumstances and options. SSVF staff should seek to determine whether the household has safe, viable, immediate housing options and resources to keep them from becoming literally homeless.

- **3A: Imminent Housing Loss.** This section explores whether a Veteran household has a place to stay tonight and whether they must in fact leave their current housing arrangement within 30 days. Staff should explore whether the Veteran household could avoid literal homelessness by negotiating directly with their landlord. Staff should also seek to determine if the Veteran household is in immediate need of assistance to ensure they have a safe and appropriate place to stay in the near term. **Note:** Applicants who are losing their housing because they are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence are eligible for SSVF Rapid Re-Housing assistance and should instead be screened for RRH assistance.
- **3B: Other Housing Options & Resources.** This section explores whether the Veteran household has other friends, family or close support networks that could assist them in avoiding literal homelessness. SSVF staff should engage in a conversation with the Veteran regarding potential support and use this information to determine whether the household has other housing options and resources available to them. Staff should be particularly mindful of any inappropriate, unsafe, or otherwise unhealthy relationships the Veteran household is reluctant or refuses to pursue and not assume such options are viable to prevent the household’s homelessness.
- **3C: Financial Resources.** This section explores whether the Veteran household has financial resources to pay for their immediate housing costs. This may include their own resources, community resources, or financial assistance they are eligible for and is available in time to prevent literal homelessness. This section should still be discussed for planning purposes even if the primary reason for the household losing their current housing is not related to financial need.

Condition 4: Other Program Eligibility Conditions: This is an optional section for additional Grantee Eligibility Requirements that must have been approved by VA SSVF Program Office. Note that the option to add an additional program eligibility condition under Stage 1 is for the purposes of prioritizing a specific subpopulation of Veteran households that was included in the approved SSVF grant agreement. For example, an SSVF grantee may have entered into an agreement with VA to serve SSVF eligible households under Rapid Re-housing and/or Homelessness Prevention but is targeting to serve 30% of those households served to be “young Veterans under age 25 with dependent children.” Adding program eligibility conditions specifically for homelessness prevention services is to support this prioritization of the targeted subpopulation during the Stage 1 screening.

Understanding Stage 1 VA SSVF HP Eligibility Disposition:

Veterans who do not meet Stage 1 eligibility requirements should be identified as “**NOT ELIGIBLE**” on the form and offered information and referral, including a “warm hand off” referral, to other assistance as needed and desired. The household should also be recorded under the “screened but not enrolled” applicants that grantees track outside of the HMIS reporting requirements for SSVF households.

A Veteran household that meets all of the VA eligibility conditions listed in Stage 1 should be identified as “**ELIGIBLE**” on the form and qualifies for, at a minimum, SSVF “Service Directed Housing Intervention” (formerly Light Touch) homelessness prevention services, which are interventions other than temporary financial assistance. These households should next be screened for Stage 2 Targeting.

STAGE 2: TARGETING

All applicants who meet Stage 1 eligibility must then be screened using the targeting conditions and threshold point system described in Stage 2. Points have been assigned to factors based on research and practical experience. Stage 2 screening provides grantees with a standardized tool for determining how to prioritize eligible Veteran households for SSVF Homelessness Prevention assistance based on:

- 1) urgency of the applicant’s current housing situation, and
- 2) other barriers and vulnerabilities that may impact their ability to quickly secure housing and resolve literal homelessness independently, if they are not assisted and become literally homeless.

Stage 2 screening is critical when an SSVF Program does not have sufficient resources or capacity to provide homelessness prevention services to every Veteran household that meets Stage 1 eligibility and is imminently at-risk of literal homelessness. As a reminder, the grantee’s established “targeting threshold” score and any additional eligibility conditions in Stage 1 must have been proposed to and approved by VA within the GIFTS system. Grantees must notify the VA when the targeting score is changed and provide explanation of how this was determined within their community. Notification of Threshold scores are submitted through GIFTS. Such changes should also be discussed with community stakeholders as part of the ongoing community planning.

Understanding Stage 2 Targeting Disposition:

Veteran households that meet Stage 1 eligibility and score at or above the approved threshold score should be identified as **“Meets Targeting Threshold”** in Stage 2.

Veteran households that have met both Stage 1 and Stage 2 requirements may receive the full range of SSVF homelessness prevention services, including any TFA. These Veteran households should be enrolled in the SSVF program and tracked within HMIS. The VA expects grantees to use a progressive approach to the delivery of services. This means that even if a household passes both the Stage 1 eligibility and Stage 2 targeting requirements of a given SSVF program TFA should not automatically be offered. Grantees should aim to provide the least intensive and costly intervention possible and only use more intensive services or the provision of TFA when absolutely necessary to prevent a household from becoming literally homeless.

Veteran households who meet Stage 1 eligibility requirements but do not score at or above the established targeting threshold score should be identified as **“Does Not Meet Targeting Threshold”** in Stage 2. These households may receive only “Service Directed Housing Interventions (SDHI)” which do not include TFA. These households receiving SDHI should be enrolled in the SSVF program and tracked within HMIS.

CERTIFYING THE VA SSVF HP SCREENING

Information recorded in the screening form must be supported by additional documentation, as indicated in the SSVF Program Guide (e.g., proof of income). Forms must be signed and dated by the head of household, by the authorized SSVF staff person completing the form, and by an SSVF program supervisor. The completed form and additional documentation must be kept in the program participant’s case file. The form is available in a fillable document, which may be completed electronically, printed, and maintained within the program participant’s case file. However, the form may also be printed and completed manually by the SSVF program staff. The screening form is available at www.va.gov/homeless/ssvf.asp within the Participant Eligibility section.