



HOW TO PLAN A ONE-DAY HOMELESS VETERAN HEALTH FAIR

There are over 100,000 homeless veterans on the street on any given night, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs. Stand downs were started in 1988 by two Vietnam veterans. Named after a military term for a combat unit's time to rest and recover while at war, today it is a grassroots effort to offer the same services to homeless veterans. The philosophy of a stand down is to give homeless veterans a hand up, not a handout. Stand downs can include food, shelter, clothing, health screenings, benefits counseling and job counseling/referral services. These events are usually organized by self-appointed community coalitions; however, any group(s) can hold a stand down.

How Long is a Stand Down?

Stand down events range from one to three days. The traditional stand down lasts three days, provides



shelter and food throughout the event and may also provide services such as haircuts, health care screenings, vision and dental care, VA benefits counseling, substance abuse counseling, legal services, etc. The two-day version, sometimes called a resource fair, provides many of the same features. There are two different one-day events: the health fair concentrates on the health and wellness section of a stand down, while the job fair concentrates on job placement and counseling. Both one-day events offer information about VA benefits and government programs such as food stamps and Social Security. For more information, visit www.nchv.org/page.cfm?id=122.

Which Type of Stand Down Should We Plan?

Consider planning a one-day health fair. Since homelessness ages an individual approximately 20 years beyond their actual age, services provided at these events usually include health care screening (HIV/AIDS, TB, Hepatitis C, etc.); health care services; eye care services or referrals; dental care services or referrals; VA benefits counseling or referrals; governmental benefits counseling or referrals (Social Security, food stamps, local health and human services); substance abuse counseling/recovery groups; mental health counseling or referrals; or housing services (referrals to programs). Additional services can include foot care, shoes and socks.

Planning a One-Day Homeless Veterans Health Fair

1. Visit www.va.gov/homeless to see if there is a stand down already planned for your area. If so, consider volunteering at this event.
2. Approach the Homeless Outreach office at the VA Medical Center in your area and tell them that your unit is trying to plan a stand down. Ask for the approximate number of homeless veterans in your area.
3. Determine when and where you would like to host the event. Consider your climate when deciding to have the event. If you are planning to host it outside, find a large, open space that is cost-effective to rent. Secure the proper permits.



AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY SUPPORT TOOLS

A collection of resources from National Headquarters to assist and guide members and volunteers in serving veterans, servicemembers and their families.

Volunteer: Engage

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4. Contact other homeless centers and food banks in your area to spread the word about the upcoming stand down to other homeless or at-risk veterans in the community.
5. After seeing what services the VA Medical Center can provide, contact the following, as needed, to provide as many free services as possible:
 - Health care screening and services:
 - Local chapter of the American Medical Association
 - Community Outreach Programs department of a large local hospital
 - Medical schools
 - Local health departments
 - Eye Care
 - This is probably the most difficult service to find. Not everyone is eligible for vision benefits at the VAMC. Call ophthalmologists in your area to see if anyone is willing to donate their time.
 - Dental Care
 - Contact the local community college—many have dental programs with students who will volunteer. In addition, dental students have to practice on a certain amount of patients in order to graduate.
 - Social Security and food stamps
 - Contact the respective local offices.
 - The VA should offer information on VA benefits. They will probably be able to offer information on substance abuse and housing services. For veterans to be admitted to veteran-only transitional housing, the referral often comes from the VA. For further assistance, contact local Vet Centers and the state Veterans Administration office.
 - Invite your American Legion post or department Service Officers to provide benefits and other useful information, like how a veteran can obtain a copy of their DD-214.
6. Download the most current Stand Down Information Form from www.nchv.org/standdown.cfm. To be listed in their database of stand down events, follow the directions to submit the form to National Coalition for Homeless Veterans.
7. Prepare to serve lunch to the veterans. Ask a restaurant or caterer to donate food. One option is to bring out a large grill and serve hamburgers.
8. Get Legion Family members to volunteer at the event; they should have nametags and wear Legion Family attire, if available. It is recommended that Legionnaires volunteer at the event, as veterans often enjoy spending time with other veterans. Additional volunteers can include local JROTC units.



Resources:

- National Stand Down Program Guide:
 - www.nchv.org/guides.cfm and click on “National Stand Down Program Design”