**Working Virtually with Public Housing Authorities**

*A Strong COVID-19 Practice in VHA Homeless Program Operations*

## INTRODUCTION

The VHA Homeless Programs Office identifies and disseminates strong, emerging practices in homeless program operations during the COVID-19 National Emergency. Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) staff at the Eastern Colorado Health Care System (HCS) partnered with their housing authorities to develop virtual modifications that allow them to continue to house homeless Veterans during COVID-19 National Emergency.

## PRACTICE OVERVIEW

Thanks to the strong partnership between HUD-VASH staff and their five Public Housing Authority (PHA) partners across Eastern Colorado HCS, the following modifications have been implemented to continue to house homeless Veterans.

**Electronic Submission of Voucher Applications:** PHAs allow HUD-VASH staff to submit PHA voucher applications electronically. All forms are scanned and submitted via Azure Rights Management Service (RMS) encrypted email.

**Virtual Orientations and Briefing:** PHAs allow HUD-VASH staff to complete all orientation / briefing paperwork at the same time that voucher application paperwork is completed. These orientation / briefing documents are sent to the PHA after the vouchers are approved, either through encrypted email or physical drop-off into locked drop-boxes. Orientations / briefings happen over telephone, one-on one, with individual clients. PHAs date the documents when the vouchers are electronically issued to the Veteran.

*NOTE: The National HUD-VASH Program Office strongly encourages HUD-VASH teams to work with local PHAs to develop and support flexible means of conducting briefings and issuing vouchers where possible. In addition to telephone contacts described above, this may include the PHAs creating an audio or video recording (utilizing YouTube, Adobe Connect, or similar) which Veterans can access on personal, public, or VA devices. Additionally, per HUD Notice PIH 2020-05, as authorized by the CARES Act, "HUD is waiving this requirement and as an alternative requirement allowing the PHA to conduct the briefing by other means such as a webcast, video call, or expanded information packet." More information can be found here:* [https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/OCHCO/documents/2020-05pihn.pdf](https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/OCHCO/documents/2020-05pihn.pdf)

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**Virtual Housing Searches:** HUD-VASH staff arranged for landlords to conduct virtual tours of prospective apartment units using video chat technology (Facetime, Skype, Google Hangouts, etc.).

**Landlord Self-Certification Inspections:** Some PHAs permit landlords to submit self-certification of Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspection forms that indicate that units would otherwise pass inspection. These self-certification forms are being used in lieu of both in-person or virtual completing inspections so that Veterans can move-in rapidly. If the unit ultimately fails inspection, the PHA may pay pro-rated Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) or withhold HAP until deficiencies are resolved.

*NOTE: Per HUD Notice PIH 2020-05, as authorized by the CARES Act, "...the PHA may rely on the owner's certification that the owner has no reasonable basis to have knowledge that life threatening conditions exist in the unit or units in question instead of conducting an initial inspection. At minimum the PHA must require this owner certification. However, the PHA may add other requirements or conditions in addition to the owner's certification but is not required to do so. The PHA is required to conduct an HQS inspection on the unit as soon as reasonably possible but no later than October 31, 2020." More information can be found here: https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/OCHCO/documents/2020-05pihn.pdf.*

For more information, please contact Shawn Liu at Shawn.Liu@va.gov.

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