

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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January 27, 2025

Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services' (MBVS) Annual Report on the implementation of the strategic plan to end veterans' homelessness in Maine, in accordance with Maine Statute, Title 30-A: §5047

Dear Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs,

The following report is submitted as the Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services' (MBVS) Annual Report on the implementation of the strategic plan to end veterans' homelessness in Maine, in accordance with Maine Statute, Title 30-A: §5047 MUNICIPALITIES AND COUNTIES; Part 2: MUNICIPALITIES; Subpart 8: DEVELOPMENT; Chapter 202: AFFORDABLE HOUSING PARTNERSHIP; Subchapter 5-A: STATEWIDE HOMELESS COUNCIL (paragraph 9, A through D, summarized at the end of the report).

About the Maine Plan to End and Prevent Veterans' Homelessness:

The Maine Plan to End and Prevent Veterans' Homelessness, established in 2017, remains the foundation of these efforts. Key objectives include:

- A. **Defining a measurable baseline for veteran homelessness.** The "By Name List" (BNL) continues to serve as the primary tool for tracking homeless veterans and coordinating services.
- B. **Developing successful metrics.** Progress is determined by the reduction in homeless veterans over time, with functional zero as the ultimate goal.
- C. **Improving interagency communication.** Quarterly the Homeless Veterans Action Committee (HVAC) meetings and weekly case consultations ensure coordinated service delivery.
- D. **Establishing a framework for progress evaluation.** Maine Housing is actively refining Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data collection and vendor management to enhance tracking and reporting.

Current Situation:

The Maine Plan to End and Prevent Veterans' Homelessness was presented to the Maine Legislature in 2017. Since then, member organizations of the HVAC have continued to meet quarterly. The HVAC is currently chaired by the Veterans Affairs (VA) Togus Healthcare for Homeless Veterans Programs Coordinator, the Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services Deputy Supervisor of Veterans' Services, and the Senior Director for Social Work at Preble Street. Other core partners include the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH), Preble Street Veterans Housing Services, Volunteers of America, Northern New England, Veterans Inc., and Maine Housing. Periodically, HVAC invites additional partner organizations, such as Fedcap, Maine Veterans in Need, Veterans Benefits Administration, and others, to report on issues relevant to the collective goal of reaching functional zero.¹

In addition to quarterly HVAC meetings, a smaller group of case workers from core organizations meet twice weekly for case consultations. These meetings coordinate efforts to ensure that each veteran on the BNL has an assigned HVAC organization actively managing their case. The HMIS, used by HUD and HVAC members, maintains the BNL of homeless veterans in Maine. All HVAC organizations must ensure that the veterans they serve are accurately recorded in the system. Case consultations help verify that every homeless veteran is accounted for and connected to services.

¹ *Functional zero is achieved when the number of homeless veterans, both sheltered and unsheltered, does not exceed the monthly rate at which veterans are placed into housing. In other words, while some veterans may experience homelessness each month, others will secure housing, and the goal is to ensure that the number entering homelessness never surpasses those finding stable housing.*

Measuring Progress:

The BNL is the primary tool for assessing the success of HVAC organizations. Between 2017 and 2022, compiling the BNL required a labor-intensive manual comparison conducted periodically for HVAC meetings. In 2023, efforts to integrate the BNL into HMIS began to improve efficiency and accuracy. While some progress has been made, ensuring standardized reporting remains a challenge for 2025. Additionally, staff continue working with HMIS support teams to customize the system for each program's needs. Weekly case consultations help verify the accuracy of reported data.

The functional zero number for Maine has yet to be determined. Participating organizations continue refining data quality to establish a reliable figure.

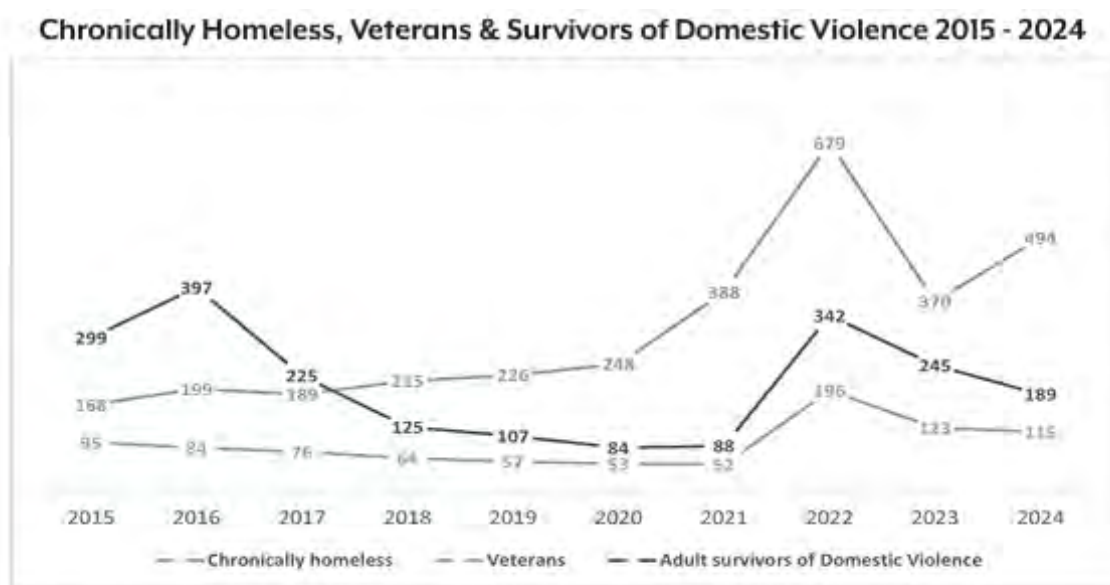
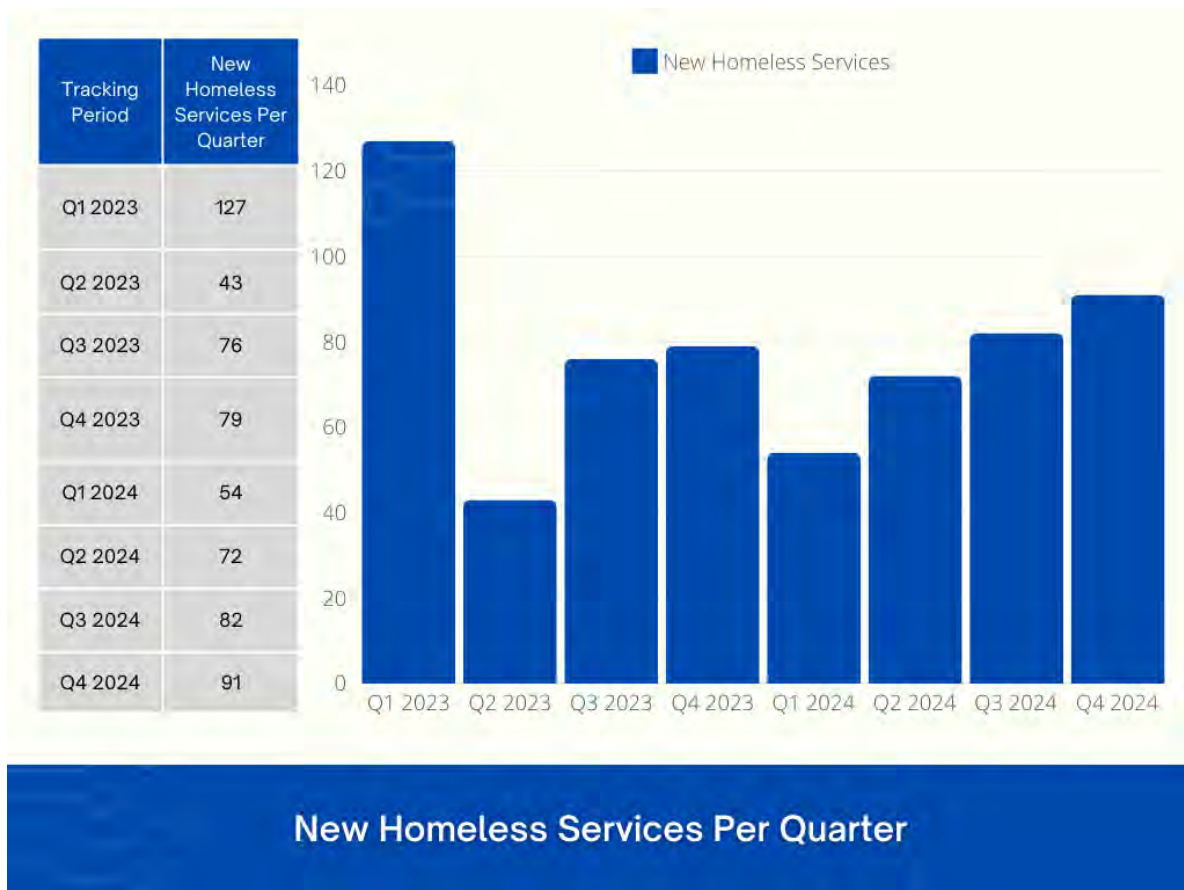


Figure 7: Special Needs Population Trends. The increased count across all three groups in 2022 can be attributed to availability of emergency relief programs discussed on page 1. However, all three subpopulations remain elevated in 2024 relative to pre-pandemic counts.

Source: <https://mainehousing.org/docs/default-source/housing-reports/2024-point-in-time-report.pdf>

Another metric, the *Point-in-Time (PIT) Survey*, provides an annual snapshot of homelessness. While imperfect, the survey helps identify trends. Data from 2015 to 2024 show a steady decline in veteran homelessness following HVAC's implementation of coordinated efforts in 2017. However, the 2022 PIT count spiked due to the expiration of pandemic-related federal aid and eviction moratoriums. Since then, the numbers have returned to pre-pandemic levels, with continued improvement in 2024.

MBVS also maintains *Intranet Quorum® (IQ)*, a case management system that records interactions with veterans and their families. Many veterans listed on the BNL are also recorded in MBVS IQ, allowing for real-time tracking and coordination with other agencies.



The graph illustrates the number of new homeless services initiated in each quarter of 2023 and 2024. It highlights fluctuations in service openings while showing an overall steady inflow of veterans. The data suggests a sustained effort to address veteran homelessness and underscores the MBVS's extensive outreach within this population.

MBVS Update on Progress Toward Functional Zero:

MBVS follows the mandates outlined in Title 37-B: Chapter 7: §514 §513-A, focusing on:

- A. **Identifying homeless veterans in Maine:** MBVS uses outreach, partnership, case consultations, and referrals from other agencies to identify homeless veterans in Maine and enter them into our IQ services tracker. Additionally, we ensure that veterans are entered into HMIS for tracking on the BNL.
- B. **Identifying and securing temporary or permanent living space for veterans within the veterans' communities:** MBVS collaborates with HVAC partners to quickly place veterans in shelters, transitional housing, or temporary hotel accommodations through the MBVS Temporary Shelter Program (TSP) while pursuing permanent housing solutions. Programs like TSP and the Veterans Emergency Financial Assistance Program (VEFAP) offer support for rent, mortgage payments, security deposits, and utilities. Our VEFAP program is currently administered by one vender, Fedcap.

- C. **Providing reimbursement to human services-based volunteer organizations that provide transitional housing to homeless veterans pursuant to collaborative agreements:** MBVS offers reimbursements for transitional housing agencies and recently updated policies to allow direct payments to organizations, landlords, and other entities preventing veteran homelessness. There is current proposed legislation to address the utilization of this fund (LD 126, “An Act to Expand the Use of the Veterans’ Homelessness Prevention Partnership Fund”). If enacted, the legislation would ensure that the MBVS can continue to rapidly resolve housing emergencies more efficiently.
- D. **Conducting annual outreach events, targeted to reach the maximum number of veterans in need, to disseminate information on resources and services available to assist homeless veterans:** In 2024, MBVS held four regional stand-down events across Maine in partnership with our community partners Veterans Healthcare Administration (VHA), Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA) including the Togus Regional Office and Medical Center, Vet Centers, veterans service organizations, Preble Street, Fedcap, Veterans Inc., Maine Department of Labor, Maine Department of Health and Human Services, and other available resources. These events were held regionally in Portland, Lewiston, Bangor and Augusta serving 81 veterans—53 of whom were homeless. Since then, 18 have transitioned into permanent housing, and efforts continue for the remaining individuals.

What Is Going Well?

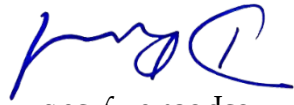
1. **The HVAC and BNL model is effective.** Progress from 2016-2022 and the post-pandemic decline in veteran homelessness demonstrate its success. From 2023 to 2024, there has continued to be a decline. The PIT count report from 2023 identified 123 homeless veterans, and in 2024, that number was 115.
2. **Legislative support has improved emergency shelter access.** The supportive services put in place by the Maine legislature to allow for emergency shelter and transitional housing of homeless veterans are also working. This has become a relied upon safety net when typical shelter solutions are not practical.
3. **Awareness campaigns drive rapid rehousing efforts.** Programs such as the *No Homeless Veteran Challenge* engage landlords and communities to assist veterans in finding stable housing.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- **Preventing over-reliance on emergency funds:** For the past two years, MBVS has exhausted emergency shelter funds before the fiscal year's end. A new means test has been introduced to ensure funds are allocated to those in genuine financial need (income limit set at 150% of the federal poverty level, however we continue to maintain a wavier process to veterans who have extenuating circumstances.) Additionally, the aforementioned LD 126 "An Act to Expand the Use of the Veterans' Homelessness Prevention Partnership Fund" would provide more flexibility, simplify our disbursement process, enhance efficiency, and ensure funds are directed where needed most.
- **Enhancing homelessness diversion strategies:** In March 2025, staff from organizations across Maine will have the opportunity to attend a Homelessness Diversion Training, led by Dan Hodgkins of Preble Street. The training, available in person and virtually, is part of "Home, Together", the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness in America conducted by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The plan is centered around adopting Housing Problem-Solving Approaches with Prevention, Diversion, and Rapid Exit Strategies and will focus on a housing problem-solving approach to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring. This strategy helps individuals leverage strengths, support networks, and community resources to prevent or quickly exit homelessness. Homelessness Diversion is crucial in ensuring veterans only experience homelessness as a last resort.
- **Bridging the gap between emergency shelter and permanent housing:** Existing programs typically fund shelter for up to 45 days, yet it often takes six months or longer to secure stable housing. Addressing this gap remains a major challenge.
- **Refining data accuracy:** The BNL manager has made significant strides in improving data integrity. A more accurate functional zero target is expected in early 2025.

The framework established in the original strategic plan, including quarterly HVAC meetings, the BNL, and frequent case consultations among HVAC members—continues to function as intended. HVAC committee members have intensified efforts to refine and clean up data, with the BNL manager now regularly generating the list through HMIS. This list is systematically organized and reviewed during weekly case consultations, leading to greater data accuracy. Additionally, Maine Housing has announced plans to transition to a new HMIS vendor, which may further enhance data management.

Discussions are ongoing regarding the benchmarks used to measure success, as the criteria set by Community Solutions and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness differ slightly. The HVAC Team is working to ensure that these benchmarks do not inadvertently restrict housing opportunities. While there is still room to improve coordination in matching veterans with the right resources at the right time, as well as bridging the gap between sheltered and permanently housed individuals, progress remains steady. Like other housing-insecure populations in Maine, there is a continued need for strategically located supportive housing. Overall, Maine is making significant strides toward achieving functional zero for homeless veterans.

Respectfully submitted,


David Richmond, Director

Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services