



VHA OEM Disaster Assistance Housing Reference



Introduction: This reference was developed to provide VHA OEM with published information that would facilitate discussions regarding VA authorities for emergency and disaster related housing. While housing is not specifically within VHA OEM mission set, developing a working knowledge of available options to advise VA Medical Center and VISN Emergency Managers may contribute to the continuity of care for Veterans.

The information contained in this reference was derived from multiple sources to include, but not limited to, the VBA Loan Guarantee Program Office, the VA Integrated Operations Center, and the VHA Homelessness/Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program Office.

This reference will be revised as additional materials are identified and forms or templates become available.

General Background: VA does not, as a standard practice, provide disaster housing assistance. Anyone (Vets and non-Vets) requesting temporary housing in the wake of a Stafford Act disaster must apply through a FEMA Disaster Recovery Center (www.DisasterAssistance.gov or by calling 800-621-3362).

FEMA validates housing application needs for all disaster survivors, including Veterans. If approved, temporary housing could come from HUD resources, from FEMA mobile homes, or from foreclosed properties which have reverted to VA.

FEMA - Has overall responsibility for coordinating federal disaster assistance plans and the subsequent administration of disaster relief activities, following a declaration by the President regarding an emergency or disaster situation.

VA activities— Emergency preparedness responsibilities are an important element of VA's mission and are integrated throughout VA programs in health care and medical services, benefits payments, guaranty functions and memorial affairs.

ESF #6 Refresher:

- Coordinating Agency: Housing and Urban Development
- Primary Agencies: Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Justice, Housing and Urban Development and Department of Agriculture
- Supporting Organizations: Corporation for National and Community Service, Department of Commerce, Department of Energy, Environmental Protection Agency, Health and Human Services, Small Business Administration, U.S. Access Board, Veterans Affairs, American Red Cross, National Organizations Active in Disasters
- Consistent with the National Disaster Housing Strategy (NDHS), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)/Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) maintains lead responsibility for sheltering and interim housing with interim housing support from Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as well as other primary agencies and support organizations.
- Sheltering falls under ESF #6 in the National Response Framework (NRF) where DHS/FEMA is the coordinating agency. Interim housing, as its name implies, is a transition to permanent housing and is dependent on the period of transition as responsibility moves from Emergency Support Function (ESF) #6 to the Housing Recovery Support Function.

Veterans Benefits Administration VBA's role with regards to Emergency Support Function (ESF) #6 Mass Care, Emergency Assistance, Housing and Human Services is as a Supporting Agency to FEMA. VA executed an MOU with FEMA in 1983. This agreement defines the working relationships between the VA and FEMA with respect to disaster preparedness and relief activities which may be coordinated during and after a major disaster or emergency.

1. The Disaster Relief Act of 1974(PL 93-288) provides for assistance by the Federal Government to State and local governments in expediting aid, assistance and emergency services resulting from a major disaster or emergency.
2. Executive Order 12148 (July 20, 1979) empowers the FEMA Director, based on authority delegated to him by the President, to enter into agreements with relief of disaster assistance organizations to provide relief during and after a major disaster or emergency.

Specifically, VBA may be able to provide assistance through three mechanisms:

1. Financial-Priority opportunities for VA borrowers displaced by disaster to acquire VA properties. VA lending assistance to purchase housing.
2. Personnel – VA representatives assigned to FEMA Disaster Assistance Centers to counsel eligible disaster victims on VA loans, and on other forms for VA assistance.
3. Housing – Single family and multiple housing units which are habitable and to which VA has title and possession may be assigned to FEMA for use by disaster victims.

VBA Loan Guarantee (LGY) Property Management roles and responsibilities under ESF #6 are as follows:

- LGY is a designated supporting member in the housing effort during an emergency or disaster situation.
- LGY POC will contact FEMA to determine if National Disaster Housing Task Force is activated.
- Obtain report showing the number of habitable properties that could be made available in a disaster
- Instruct contractor to obtain inspections on all VA properties in affected areas, & update habitability report.
- Issue Special Forbearance guidance to contractor.
- If needed, provide data on:
 - Qualifications of tenants;
 - Rental logistics (terms, payments, terminations);
 - Evaluate rental successes & need for extensions
 - Plan for sale to or relocation of tenants

In summation, VBA and the Loan Guarantee Program do maintain a housing capability, however, that capability is accessed through FEMA and only when requested.

- Housing: Single family and multiple housing units which are habitable and to which VA has title and possession may be assigned to FEMA for use by disaster victims.
- The pool of VA properties is limited due to lack of clear and marketable title, habitability, and other statuses such as being under a sales agreement.
- There is no Veteran specification
- Veterans are encouraged to contact FEMA at 1-800-621-3362 for more information.
- Once Veterans receive FEMA-certified disaster status they become eligible not just for VA-acquired properties, but also HUD properties and other organizations.
- This provides a greater pool of properties for Veterans to receive housing.
- HUD's inventory of houses far exceeds the number of VA-acquired properties.
- If Veterans were limited to VA-acquired properties, there would more than likely not be enough available properties for Veterans...

Guidance on Natural Disasters for Veteran Borrowers can be found at the end of this reference.

VA Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program awards grants to private non-profit organizations and consumer cooperatives that can provide supportive services to very low-income Veteran families living in or transitioning to permanent housing.

The SSVF program was authorized by Public Law 110-387 and provides supportive services to very low-income Veteran families that are currently in or transitioning to permanent housing. SSVF is designed to rapidly re-house homeless Veteran families and prevent homelessness for those at imminent risk due to a housing crisis. Funds are granted to private non-profit organizations and consumer cooperatives that will assist very low-income Veteran families by providing a range of supportive services designed to promote housing stability.

VA has made ending homelessness among Veterans by the end of 2015 a top priority, undertaking an unprecedented campaign to dramatically increase successful outcomes for Veterans and their families who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Estimates for Veteran homelessness have dropped substantially in the past several years. There has been a twenty-four percent reduction in Veteran homelessness since 2010. To achieve the goal of ending Veteran homelessness, VA must continue to assist families transitioning from homelessness to permanent housing and prevent at-risk families from becoming homeless. SSVF Program is designed to help Veteran families quickly regain stability in permanent housing after experiencing a housing crisis and/or homelessness.

Through the SSVF Program, VA aims to improve very low-income Veteran families' housing stability. The first core concept is that SSVF programs utilize a Housing First approach. The essential idea of Housing First is that people's need for housing is a basic need that should be met as quickly as possible, without any preconditions. To meet this goal, grantees (private non-profit organizations and consumer cooperatives) provide eligible Veteran families with outreach, case management, and assistance in obtaining VA and other benefits, which may include:

Health care services

Daily living services

Personal financial planning services

Transportation services

Fiduciary and payee services

Legal services

Child care services

Housing counseling services

In addition, grantees also provide time-limited payments to third parties (e.g., landlords, utility companies, moving companies, and licensed child care providers) if these payments help Veterans' families stay in or acquire permanent housing on a sustainable basis.

Locate an SSVF provider

To learn if there is an SSVF provider in your community, please visit <http://www.va.gov/homeless/ssvf.asp> and look for the list of current year SSVF providers or call VA's National call Center for Homeless Veterans at 1-877-4AIDVET (1-877-424-3838).

Application Process

If you are interested in applying to become an SSVF grantee, you can find application information at <http://www.va.gov/homeless/ssvf.asp> and <http://grants.gov>. When grant funds become available, VA publishes a Notice of Fund Availability (NOFA) in the Federal Register.

Program highlights

In only the second year of program operations, SSVF grantees assisted over 65,000 Veterans and their family members, including nearly 16,000 dependent children. Overall 83 percent of the homeless and imminently at-risk Veteran families served were placed in permanent housing through SSVF.

Additional Information

For more information, please visit: <http://www.va.gov/homeless/ssvf.asp> or send an e-mail to the program at SSVF@va.gov.



VA GUIDANCE ON NATURAL DISASTERS

INFORMATION FOR VETERAN BORROWERS

If you have a VA loan and your home was affected by a natural disaster, we encourage you to take the steps listed below to ensure you receive the assistance you need.

(1) Contact FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency)

Begin the disaster application process online at www.DisasterAssistance.gov or by calling 800-621-3362. In order to receive the maximum assistance, you must register with FEMA before their deadline expires. Do not pay your loan in full before checking with the Small Business Administration (SBA) regarding a loan for the uninsured portion of your loss. Additional support, including low-interest loans, cash grants, and housing assistance may be available from agencies associated with the disaster recovery effort. For more information, go to www.fema.gov.

(2) Contact Your Mortgage Company

You are responsible for making regular monthly loan payments, even if your home is not habitable, so contact your lender as soon as possible regarding your loss. If you are unable to make payments on time, we encourage you to discuss forbearance or a loan modification. Also have your lender explain procedures for insurance loss checks, repairs to your property, payments to contractors, etc.

You may also contact VA at **877-827-3702** to speak with a Loan Specialist about your options.

If your home was adapted through VA's **Specially Adapted Housing** program, please contact us at **877-827-3702** because you may have remaining grant funds to help with repairs.

(3) Contact Your Insurance Company

File an insurance claim as soon as possible; however, do not make a hasty settlement on insurance. When the property is damaged but repairable, attempt to get your local engineer's office to inspect your home for structural damage. If possible, get at least two estimates from licensed contractors for cost of repairs or rebuilding. -- Insurance checks for personal property and living expenses should be payable to you only. Checks for damage to your home should be payable to both you and your mortgage company.

(4) Change your Address

If you are receiving a monthly benefit check from VA or another source and you will not be able to receive mail at your regular address, notify your local post office and VA Regional Office (benefits.va.gov/homeloans/rlcweb.asp) of your change of address. For information on other VA benefits, call 800-827-1000.

(5) Check Other Sources for Assistance

Contact local offices of the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans (DAV) or other veterans' organizations to see if special assistance may be available, even to non-members of the organization.

INFORMATION FOR MORTGAGE LENDERS

Lenders must check with FEMA to obtain the specific counties and corresponding declaration dates (www.fema.gov/disasters) along with any amendments to the declaration.

Loan Closed Prior to Disaster. Any loan closed prior to the date of the declared disaster is eligible for VA Guaranty without regard to the disaster. The "Information for Mortgage Servicers" section below applies to these cases.

Properties Appraised Prior to Disaster. If the property was appraised on or before the date of the declared disaster and not closed prior to that date, the following items must be submitted with the VA guaranty request:

(1) Lender Certification

This is to affirm that the property which is security for VA loan number _____ has been inspected to ensure that it was either not damaged in the recently declared disaster or has been restored to its pre-disaster condition or better.

(Lender Signature) _____
(Lender Title) _____
(Date)

(2) Veteran Certification

I have inspected the property located at _____ and find its condition now to be acceptable to me. I understand that I will not be charged for any disaster-related expenses and now wish to close the loan.

(Veteran Signature) _____
(Date)

(3) VA Loan Summary Sheet (VA Form 26-0286). The Remarks section of this form must be annotated “Lender and Veteran Disaster Certifications Enclosed.” Additionally, if local law requires the property to be inspected and approved by the local building inspection authority, a copy of the appropriate local report(s) must be provided. Neither VA nor the veteran purchaser shall bear the expense of any disaster-related inspection or repairs.

(4) Decline in Value. If there is an indication that the property, despite repairs, will be worth less at the time of loan closing than it was at the time of appraisal, the lender must have the VA appraiser update the original value estimate. The payment of the appraiser’s fee for that service will be a contractual matter between the buyer and seller. *If the property value has decreased, the loan amount must be reduced accordingly.*

(5) Employment/Income Certification. Lenders must confirm prior to closing that the veteran’s employment and income have not changed since the loan application. If at time of closing the veteran or co-borrower is no longer employed or income has been reduced, this information should be reported to VA or the automatic underwriter, as appropriate, for evaluation prior to closing.

INFORMATION FOR MORTGAGE SERVICERS

Mortgage servicers must check with FEMA to obtain the specific counties and corresponding declaration dates (www.fema.gov/disasters) along with any amendments to the declaration.

Assistance to Homeowners. *VA encourages servicers of guaranteed loans in disaster areas to extend all possible forbearance to borrowers in distress.* VA regulations on Prepayments (38 CFR 36.4311), Advances (38 CFR 36.4314), Loan Modifications (38 CFR 36.4315) and Supplemental Loans (38 CFR 36.4359) may be of assistance in appropriate cases. It is the loan holder’s responsibility to counsel borrowers concerning assistance that may be available.

Moratorium on Foreclosures. Although the loan holder is ultimately responsible for determining when to initiate foreclosure and complete termination action, VA encourages holders to establish a 90-day moratorium on initiating new foreclosures in the disaster area.

Insurance Requirements. VA regulations (38 CFR 36.4329) require that lenders and holders ensure that homes financed with VA-guaranteed loans be sufficiently insured against hazards. Insurance proceeds are to be applied to the restoration of the security or the loan balance. The burden of proof is upon the holder to establish that no increase in VA’s ultimate liability is attributable to failure of the holder to have the property properly insured or properly apply an insurance loss settlement.

Case-specific appraisal, origination and servicing issues may be directed to the appropriate VA Regional Loan Center (benefits.va.gov/homeloans/rlcweb.asp).